
University of Chester

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Portfolio

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Portfolio: *Chimera*

# Preface

The work presented here forms part of a projected novel, and follows on from the 3,000 words submitted for module ENM 108 under the same title.

Since it forms the beginning of the projected novel, the 3,000-word section has been included here for completeness. However, as it has previously been submitted for assessment, it is excluded from the word count. It immediately precedes the material to be assessed, and is distinguished from it by 1.5-line spacing, page numbers in Roman numerals and by the words ‘Previously-submitted material’ in the header.

*Chimera:*

First 3,000 words

This work has previously been submitted and is not intended for assessment.

# 1.

> Richard Turnbull – radical atheist, learned scrounger, linguist and literary aspirant – exemplifies that futile rebellion and refusal to conform to the social norms which achieves nothing of lasting value. By the standards of his own age as well as of ours, he was a simple failure.
>
> John Hunter, *Richard Turnbull*, 1958

The Blue Teapot in Clapham, a vibrant tearoom which served some of the finest organic soups, home-made sandwiches and cakes in London, had some two hundred years previously been the scene of a nasty incident. A plaque above the corner seat which looked out through dimpled bow windows onto a back-street explained that

> *From this seat in November 1812 Henri de Saint-Gilles, a French émigré, was arrested as a spy and taken to Newgate prison where he was later executed.*

During the short time of his incarceration in Newgate amongst foul-smelling common criminals, Henri de Saint-Gilles fervently rebutted the charges against him. He denounced with equal venom the Englishman who claimed to have brought him to justice. Richard Turnbull was an insidious, traitorous brute.

Saint-Gilles was hanged and beheaded on the morning of January 31st, 1813, still protesting his innocence to the jeering crowd who turned out despite the bitter weather. His fate had no effect on the Blue Teapot's clientele; but on dark, wet November nights, after the café had closed, its proprietor Peter Marchmont greeted the ghost of Saint-Gilles with enthusiasm. They were old friends.

Peter Marchmont had bought the Blue Teapot because of its connection with Saint-Gilles. His enfeebled and decrepit mother having died at just the right moment – the only thing she had ever done to his benefit – Peter sold the comfortable house in Primrose Hill which had been in the family for generations and bought the three storeys which comprised the Blue Teapot and a small self-contained flat. The purchase left him with money in hand, but it was not enough for the serious pursuit of his hobby. He decided to run the café himself; a recourse which had the combined advantages of cutting costs and avoiding the necessity of working with other people. He took to cooking as he had taken to no other job. It was, he

discovered, an alchemy which demanded spiritual readiness, exactitude and cleanliness; qualities as natural in him as they were noticeably lacking in women, that messy, fluid half of the species who traditionally performed the task.

At seven-thirty Peter Marchmont, alone in his private kitchen, ate his tea of pumpkin soup, two granary rolls with butter, a slice of carrot cake topped with cream-cheese icing, a cup of Earl Grey without milk. At eight o'clock he folded his napkin precisely, corner to corner, and mounted the uncarpeted stairs to his attic study; a windowless room accessible only through a concealed door; a dark womb to which he alone controlled access. On the antique mahogany desk at which he now sat, he had carefully arranged the writing paraphernalia of a nineteenth-century gentleman: two crystal ink wells, five quill pens in a cup, blotting sand and a stack of paper. He lit the two candles which stood in brass candlesticks, looked across to the empty chair on the other side of the desk.

What remains of a life once it is finished? Words, only words; that is all that remains of Richard Turnbull and Henri de Saint-Gilles. Faded ink on mottled paper. The written accounts have become flesh and blood; in them these men live for ever. That was why Peter so badly needed more of the Turnbull autobiography. But he was doing what he could to procure that; it was in God's hands now. Well, God's and Drue Paulin's. If you want a job doing properly, you have to be prepared to wait as well as pay, Drue had told him. Arrogant little sod, but good at what he did. Which was why Peter was prepared to pay so much.

From a drawer he unlocked a sheaf of papers and a notebook. Five letters, for which he had paid two thousand pounds. A tattered notebook which, in a dingy basement bookshop off the Tottenham Court Road, had cost him next to nothing. Old Bill Sinclair hadn't known what he was selling, had hardly looked at the pile of books Peter had thrust under his nose. Heart not in it any more; just biding his time till he retired. Good job that hawk-eyed son of his hadn't been about. Forty pounds the lot, Bill had said, and Peter had paid up, his heart thumping, feigning nonchalance.

The letters had been a disappointment. A Victorian woman's prolix outpourings. A couple of references to Richard Turnbull, but nothing of any use. Tomorrow, though, they might come in useful. Peter read them again, scanning for anything he might have missed.

> September 1810 I had not been in London above one week, when I realised how wise I had been to remove here. … My life here is as full as anyone could wish for – save for the presence

of one. You know of whom I speak. … I am not certain, however, that he still resides in this city. He had the habit of travelling about the country.

March 1814 You ask after my aunt, and I regret to inform you there is no improvement. She weakens daily. … What will become of me when she is no more? … Tom and Emily would have me live with them in Manchester, but I fear to become little more than a servant. It is not work I fear, Fanny, but the wearing down of my higher faculties … If I had but the money, I should set up a small school for the daughters of gentlemen.. …

April 1814 It is my sad duty to inform you that my aunt Spencer breathed her last on Friday sevennight. … She departed this life with calm equanimity, trusting in the God she revered. Doctor Morris attended her last hours. … Edmund managed to return, before she lapsed into semi-consciousness … My aunt saw fit to leave me in her will a substantial sum of money, … If I am frugal, this should prove sufficient to set up a school.

February 1815 My school is now set up. I have five pupils this quarter … I have weathered great changes, but I am settled now. My life is ordered and regular. …

October 1825 I am quite content … Two weeks ago, I received a visit from Mr Turnbull. Do you remember him, Fanny? … So many years ago now. He is little changed. … I have been somewhat indisposed of late – a cough which lingers – and the inclement weather has dispirited me.

## 2.

'I will see you again, won't I?' He kissed her forehead, caressed her cheek. She smiled and, leaving the warmth of the bed, went to shower. Later, while she dried her hair, he brought her coffee, tidied her strewn clothes.

'Do you have to go, Julia? You haven't eaten.'

'I've a meeting. It's important.' Then, picking up her coat, 'Lock the door when you leave. I'll ring you.'

It was dark already, the air chill, neon-orange pools reflected on the wet pavements. Eight-thirty, he had said. She hurried through the early-evening crowds, took the bus to Deptford

and the train to Greenwich; excited, a little afraid. She found him where he had said he would be, in the crowded dining room of the Spanish Galleon.

'John Selby?' Grey hair, piggy brown eyes.

'Miss Dalton.' Without rising, he shook her hand. 'Shall we order before we get down to business?' It was not a question. When the food came, he ate in silence for several minutes, his eyes on his plate, then asked, 'So why choose Richard Turnbull for your MA thesis?'

'He's interesting. Born around the time of the French Revolution, phenomenally intelligent, speaks umpteen languages, but doesn't want to work for a living or settle anywhere. Prefers wandering round the country using people's libraries and cadging board and lodging in return for intellectual conversation and small unpaid commissions. In some ways a very modern figure: a dropout, an atheist, a maverick.'

'And a traitor and a French spy!'

She was taken aback by his vehemence. 'What evidence do you have for that?'

'As yet, only circumstantial. I'm working on it. What do you have?'

'A fragment of his autobiography. One of goodness knows how many. I thought it would be easier studying someone who's so obscure – only two published works means there's a market out there. But the downside is that the source material is scattered about the country. There could be any number of documents in archives and private collections, undiscovered.'

'That's why we need each other.'

'Pool resources, you mean?'

'Something like that.'

'And what's your interest in Richard Turnbull?'

'Let's say an old friendship. You said in your advertisement that you wanted information relating to Elizabeth Fitzroy.'

'You've got information on Elizabeth Fitzroy?'

He aligned his knife and fork carefully so they were exactly parallel, folded his napkin corner to corner. 'Five letters, written by her between 1810 and 1825, which I am prepared to exchange for your autobiography. Either permanently or for a set period – say one month. And we can each inform the other of any other information we come across.'

They agreed to meet in a week's time. She hailed a cab in Creek Road and as it trundled down the A2 in now-pelting rain, leant her head against the cool window and thought about John Selby. There was something about him she did not like. Miles would not approve; like all detectives, he was suspicious of everyone. Selby could be anybody. But she had run out of leads. He could be a psychopath for all she cared, as long as she got the information she

wanted. In any case, she had not shown him all her hand; she had not mentioned the Fitzroy manuscript. Three weeks ago, she had spent two wet, cold and miserable hours in the Hankinson Museum in Manchester, under the hostile eye of an attendant, poring over a page of Elizabeth Fitzroy's journal.

When she got home from Greenwich, she opened a bottle of Merlot, cleared the papers from her desk and reread the transcription she had made of that document. The original was a single sheet of paper covered on both sides with a frenetic scrawl, full of dashes and crossings-out, in places almost unreadable.

> Oct. 7th 1825 - I dined alone this evening, and took a glass of wine, for my stomach. I was in the drawing room at the old house in Manchester, warm by the fire, the candles lit, with Tom and Father, reading the *Edinburgh Review*. I relive each of the days of that winter. – Memories, outside time – like the journals I have kept, possess a life of their own. They are, however, but images of a dead reality – their existence an illusion, a piece of flotsam to which I cling in a cold and icy sea. I am outwardly a calm and contented schoolmistress of middling age. – But locked inside, hid from view, a turbulent chaos – this second more surely I than the other, the impostor. – And whom did Richard Turnbull see when he called this evening? He alone – Tomorrow I must rise again as principal of Miss Fitzroy's Seminary for Young Ladies, Charles-square, but tonight I am that girl who learned Greek at his side. He had seen the advertisement for my school in the newspaper. He has been out of the country – has, it seems, been occupied with important work. The years have been kind to him, the lines upon his face not unbecoming, the same flint-grey coruscation in his eyes. – My own face ravaged by time and smallpox. – He the rose gone from bud to full bloom – I the flower withering already on its stem. Richard, Richard. – Once, – but no one knows, not even Tom – those moments my whole life. Now a plateau of steady employment, plain fare – but my life has described a curve – an ascent to a brief peak, followed by a great falling away. He was not made as other mortals – he must be free, bound to nothing. His work was his own, hidden, secret – dangerous work, he said – this went ill with his literary endeavours, but there was something in his nature, something inflexible and unfettered – his disposition was such that he might have turned out very good or very ill. – I am not sure how he has turned out. – And tonight – while a stillborn hope formed in my heart – while he held my hand in his a moment – he stood before me as a stranger. – I inquired after his Lexicon – how I hoped, years ago, to help him with it! – It proceeds slowly, he said; much remains still to be done. – The same response he gave me fifteen years ago.

# 3.

On returning from Greenwich, Peter Marchmont went directly to his study. Safe in this shadowy, confined space, he could discard for a while the carefully-constructed mask of his daily life. Not here the overweight, ugly child taunted in playground and common room; nor the lumbering inarticulate boy his mother had punished for the pain of his father's abandonment. The galvanic memory of Joan Marchmont on her deathbed had only recently superseded that of Joan Marchmont sitting on the crushed velvet cushion of her dressing stool, her elegant sheer-stockinged thighs packed into a skirt of short Crimplene, applying cold cream, powder, rouge, mascara; back-combing her hair into an elaborate bouffant mound; an endless ritual which Peter, craning his head round the doorway, watched each evening with bewilderment. He knew that if she saw him she would turn, her pink lips a rictus of anger, and scream at him to get out, leave her alone. Before she went out she would graze the top of his head with a kiss as he lay, back turned, on the sofa. Mrs Seymour, the housekeeper, put him to bed. He pretended to sleep, but afterwards crept to his tiny playroom to read and sob by the light of a torch. Often he slept on the floor, waking before his mother but not daring to enter her room for fear of bruising words and the sweet stench which permeated the room after her nights out.

He had constructed a prosthetic armour about himself, trained himself to articulacy, effaced himself from view. Only in his study did he lay his carapace aside. No prying eyes, no judgements within these walls. Here his fat fingers held a pen as skilfully as any man's, as he painstakingly reconstructed the story of Henri de Saint-Gilles and Richard Turnbull.

Saint-Gilles was innocent. He had been eliminated by Richard Turnbull, the double agent who had allegedly brought him to justice, for having discovered Turnbull's true identity. Peter Marchmont had made it his life's mission to liberate Saint-Gilles from the calumny and misjudgement he had suffered. All he needed was to produce the evidence.

William Montague's 1848 memoir suggested that Turnbull might have got into France around the year 1799. Peter opened the *Memoir of Richard Turnbull* and found the passage.

> Robert Turnbull, in an effort to interest his son in employment of a productive nature, sent him at the age of 18 to an old business partner in London. For Richard the sojourn was replete with mixture. The long days in the manufactory at Catherine-street produced in him an acute depression of spirits; he was as little made for regularity and submission to superiors, as a wild horse is to the pulling of a plough. Yet he found such employment of another nature in the

capital as to compensate fully for the pains of commerce. Town life so thrilled him with its plays, societies and opportunities for learning, above all its unceasing movement, that he came to call London his second home.

Richard's stay in the metropolis was interrupted by the death of his father, and it was long before he returned. Five days after his father's interment, he set out upon a journey. I believe he spent some time upon the Continent; and may even have taken the foolhardy step of entering into France. His ability to speak the language was such that he could have passed for a native; and by his own admission he was reckless enough in those days. Yet, though I later formed with him the strongest of attachments, never could I prevail upon him to speak of those years.

Peter turned next to the autobiographical fragment in the notebook which he had bought from Bill Sinclair. It contained one sentence which proved that Turnbull knew Paris. Not much, but it was a start.

When I drew near to London in the year 1825, and stood looking down at the city from the village of Hampstead, I wondered that I had been so eager to leave it. The city affects me thus; sated, exhausted, spewed out by life's scintillating exuberance as much as by the filthy miasmas and stinking alleys, I long once more for green hills and birdsong, the myriad raindrop lenses upon a branch. Satiation being, however, a matter of contrast, I tire eventually of the country also, seek then the jostling crowds of the metropolis where the streets are never empty, never silent; where the ugly dirt of the rookery is as congenial to me as the beauty of the palace. Thus it is that I am obliged to remain in a state of flux between city and country. I belong nowhere. I belong everywhere.

To this city I must always return. Even Paris, though its buildings are more fair, can not compare. Well is it named the metropolis, the mother city. I grew in her, learnt the secrets of life in her and, though I repudiate her, always I return. London takes the place of my earthly mother, who abandoned me. She is a womb in which all things are conceived; the foul and pestilential as well as the high and noble, the monster as well as the saint.

I lodged with a friend in Clapham, the scholar William Montague, who was pleased to grant me a room in return for assistance in his current work. 'My translation of Lucan proceeds slowly, Dick,' he said; 'so much of my day is taken up with business of a less congenial nature.' By which he meant his commerce in the city, which uses up his time and his energy but which is necessary for the making of his living.

I spent the days in his library, checking his translation. His hours of work being long, I worked also upon these my Memoirs, my Lexicon and my Treatise on Languages. That same year also I called once upon Miss Fitzroy, a lady whose acquaintance I had made twenty years

before, when she dwelt at Manchester, and in whose father's house I had spent many a pleasant day and evening. I taught the rudiments of Greek to Miss Fitzroy and her brother Tom. Her father being now dead, Miss Fitzroy had removed to London and set up a school.

The rest of the notebook was blank.

3212 words

*Chimera*

Work to be assessed.

# 4.

Could Richard Turnbull have been a French spy?

On 1st February, 1813, *The Times* had reported the execution the previous day of one Henri de Saint-Gilles. 'While still alive,' the article concluded,

> the prisoner was taken down from the scaffold and his bowels removed and burnt; his head was next severed from his body, and the body quartered; as befits that vilest of criminals, the TRAITOR.
>
> Mr Turnbull, earlier instrumental in the apprehension of this reprobate, attended the execution, and is to be congratulated on his renunciation of personal sensibilities in this affair.

The part played by Richard Turnbull, however, and the nature of his personal sensibilities, were not disclosed.

This was a matter of some interest to Julia Dalton, almost two centuries later, because it hinted at a link between Turnbull and Saint-Gilles which had entered the historical record. Julia had at first been inclined to reject John Selby's claims about Richard Turnbull; in the light of the newspaper's report, she realised the matter needed careful investigation.

It was important, she reflected, not to underestimate the atmosphere of confusion and suspicion produced in England by the French Revolution and the ensuing Napoleonic Wars. In a country racked by distrust and accusation, espionage and counter-espionage, no one was above suspicion. Even Wordsworth and Coleridge, in the summer of 1797, had been suspected of spying for the French, when all they were doing was roaming the countryside researching the *Lyrical Ballads*. Against this background, it was not impossible that Richard Turnbull, a maverick of avowed revolutionary ideals, should turn out to have been a French

spy. That Julia did not like the idea was of no consequence. Her task was to establish the facts.

On the morning of her second meeting with John Selby, she reviewed those few facts she had at her disposal. Montague, in his *Memoir of Richard Turnbull,* had touched on an episode with Saint-Gilles, but his account was frustratingly lacking in detail:

> I first made acquaintance with Richard Turnbull in the year 1810. We met in Joseph Turner's coffee house in Green-street, in the village of Clapham where I have my residence. Out of our common passion for languages grew a friendship which ended only with Richard's untimely death. Though he was the younger man, I looked up to him as to a brother, and his loss afflicts me still.
>
> From the spring of 1810 and throughout 1811 Richard's life, like my own, was one of contentment and regularity. He lodged with his employer Mr Bellas; but his duties were not onerous, consisting most often of errands to London and of help with Mr Bellas's experiments; Richard therefore had ample leisure. It was through Mr Bellas that he was introduced into Lord Alexander's circle, and he frequently spent the evenings of the season dining in town. Never one to follow the dictates of others, and not averse to sleeping in a ditch when the fancy took him, Richard could be charming enough when he chose; his wit and intellectual power – and even his trenchant honesty, which cut like a sabre – meant that he was a valued guest and had Lord Alexander's protection.
>
> It was this connexion – Lord Alexander being a relation of Lord Castlereagh, who was then the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs – which led to the upheaval in Richard's life early in 1812.
>
> One afternoon in May, while I was quietly dining off a leg of mutton, Richard burst into the room, spattered with mud, having ridden from town on one of Lord Alexander's horses. His hair had come loose from its ribbon, and his blue eyes were ablaze. Flinging himself into a chair, he said, in a voice of feigned lightness,

'I am to leave Clapham at first light tomorrow.'

'What? My dear fellow, I understood you to be settled here!'

'Indeed I am; more settled, and happy, than ever I thought I could be. But this is a time of war, and a man must serve his country howsoever he can.'

'Good God, man; you're not going to join the army!'

He smiled. 'You know as well as I, William, that I have not the docility to take orders, especially from those less educated than I. No; I have been called upon to perform a service of some gravity for Lord Alexander which will take me from here – I know not for how long. I plan to return, however, upon conclusion of the matter. I know I can rely on you, Will, to say nothing of this to anyone. Come, give me a glass, and we will toast our friendship.'

He left the next day, in excellent spirits, and I had no doubt that he would return the same carefree fellow that had left. It was late October before I saw him again; and it was obvious, that a shadow had crossed him. The public's knowledge of this sorry and painful affair allows me to draw a veil over it; I will say only that Richard, notwithstanding that he comported himself with the utmost of honour, was much distressed by the part he was made to play in it.

The trial of Henri de Saint-Gilles, for high treason, took place in late January 1812. It was a complex business, with many witnesses called on both sides. To her excitement, Julia had recently found the trial transcript on the Internet; it was long and heavy-going, but it might well prove to be the richest source of illumination on the matter.

She hurriedly tidied her desk, stacked her cup and bowl in the dishwasher and left for work. Her flat, four rooms at the top of a Victorian house in New Cross, belonged to her aunt Tricia, her mother's sister. Widowed after thirty-two years of marriage, Tricia had packed her bags and set off, alone, for Australia; in search, she said, of a little excitement in her life. She had lent Julia the flat, at a very reasonable rent, for as long as she wanted it. To cover her outgoings, Julia taught French and English four days a week at the Brunswick Academy, a language school in Lambeth. By getting up at six every morning and eating her bran flakes at

her desk, she managed to snatch an hour of work before she left.

She set out early for Greenwich that evening. She needed to walk, to feel her feet pound the pavement. Exhilarated by the rough wind on her face, the numberless people she crossed but did not touch, the constant rush of the traffic, she let go, felt her mind relax. Outside Deptford Town Hall a young man, Bible in hand, shouted words of encouragement, or reprobation, which collided with the wind and disappeared, unheeded.

She saw Selby, who once again had arrived before her, at a table by the window. He waited till she had settled opposite him, then handed her a brown envelope.

'The letters. Elizabeth Fitzroy. As promised.'

Julia had brought – also in a brown envelope – a copy of her autobiographical fragment. She had owned the original, written on the end-papers of an ancient edition of *Table Talk* which had once belonged to Richard Turnbull, since she was eighteen. The book had been a gift from her piano teacher when she left for university. It was not valuable, Miss Yeats had said, but there was a surprise in it. Julia had spent hours deciphering the untidy handwriting at the back of the book, such a contrast to the copperplate regularity of the name 'Richard Turnbull' inscribed on the title page. She had spent more hours just staring at it, dizzied by the layers of time it represented. These pages had been this man's now; his flesh-and-blood hands, holding open the book, had formed this close-written scribble interspersed with occasional curlicues and flourishes. But this distillate of the past was itself a lens on an anterior time; a subjective account, formed through the distorting glass of memory, of his past.

'Tell me,' she said, staring Selby in the eyes, 'why you believe Richard Turnbull to have been a spy.'

'You are familiar, I suppose, with Montague's *Memoir*?'

‘Of course! But it says little about the affair.’

‘Exactly. It’s what he omits which is significant. Montague was protecting his friend. The trial proves the extent of Turnbull’s involvement.’

‘But Saint-Gilles was convicted.’

‘As the outsider, he was always going to be.’ Selby leant forward, placed his arms on the stained table between them. Julia moved her stool back a little. He continued, ‘Saint-Gilles flees the Terror in 1793, arrives in London with nothing but the clothes he stands up in and a few books salvaged from his chateau. He is a liberal, educated man. He settles in Clapham and, like many of his compatriots, earns a living giving French and dancing lessons. In 1810 Richard Turnbull lands up in Clapham and befriends him.’

‘What?’

Selby smiled. ‘Yes, Miss Dalton, they were friends. For a couple of years. Then, in 1812, Turnbull goes off on his “service of some gravity”. Tracking down the spy – allegedly. Spying on his own account. It all depends on how you read it. Then, when he’s rumbled, he turns the tables and frames Saint-Gilles.’

‘Forgive me for banging on about evidence; but do you have anything at all to back up these assertions?’

‘Your scepticism is laudable, Miss Dalton. I will contact you when I am in a position to share my evidence with you.’

They shook hands and Julia left. It was not yet ten o’clock. She tried to ring Miles; he did not answer his house phone and his mobile was switched off. In any case, she wanted to read the letters. Elizabeth, unlike Richard, had left so little behind her. She hurried to the station.

# 5.

## The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles, for High Treason

## 30th January 1813

## I.

The prisoner, being set to the bar, pleaded Not Guilty to the indictment of High Treason.

Mr. Joseph Barclay was sworn, and examined by Mr. Ludlow for the Crown.

Mr Ludlow: What is your business?

Joseph Barclay: I am a sea-captain. I own a cutter, a fine vessel, as fast on a wind as any of her class.

Mr. Ludlow: And where do you live?

Joseph Barclay: At Dover.

Mr Ludlow: And what business do you make with your vessel?

Joseph Barclay: I deliver goods under commission. I have also worked for the Excise.

Mr Ludlow: Have you recently delivered goods for a Monsieur LeConte?

Joseph Barclay: Not since August of last year. Over a period of about two years, I delivered letters for M. LeConte, from Dover to Boulogne and Calais.

Mr Ludlow: So, from the summer of 1810 to August of 1812 you delivered these letters?

Joseph Barclay: Yes.

Mr Ludlow: How were they carried to you?

Joseph Barclay: I received them from M. LeConte or one of his gentlemen at an address in London.

Mr Ludlow: What was that address?

Joseph Barclay: Number 27, Litchfield-street.

Mr Ludlow: M. LeConte's residence?

Joseph Barclay: At the time I presumed so. I have since learnt that it was not his residence, but an address used to conduct this business.

Mr. L.: You travelled to London to receive the letters?

Joseph Barclay: Yes.

Mr Ludlow: How much were you paid by M. LeConte for the delivery of these letters to France?

Joseph Barclay: 25 or 30 pounds a trip for the safe delivery of the letters. The London coach was paid for me.

Mr Ludlow: And to whom were these letters addressed?

Joseph Barclay: To different people. I merely had to deposit them with the harbour master at Boulogne or Calais.

Mr Ludlow: And why did you stop taking these commissions?

Joseph Barclay: I became aware of their contents.

Mr Ludlow: How came you to be aware of the contents?

Joseph Barclay: I had been told by M. LeConte that the letters related to French prisoners and exiled noblemen in this country; that they were intended to bring comfort to their families. In May of 1812, I was asked by M. LeConte to carry a large number of letters. One of these was badly sealed and came open. I was shocked by what I read.

Mr Ludlow: What did you read?

Joseph Barclay: I found information concerning the readiness for war of the troops in the garrison at Dover.

Mr Ludlow: And what did you then?

Joseph Barclay: I opened further of the letters, to see if they contained information of the same nature.

Mr Ludlow: And?

Joseph Barclay: It was so. Lists of ships in the ports, with details of men and guns and victuals. Lists of the garrisons likewise.

Mr Ludlow: And what did you with the letters?

Joseph Barclay: I came up to London. I saw M. LeConte. I said I was no longer prepared to carry letters for him, and demanded the money I was owed. I was determined to have no more to do with this affair.

Mr Ludlow: And what was his reply?

Joseph Barclay: That if I ceased to work with him, he would expose me as an accomplice.

Mr Ludlow: Where in London did you meet with M. LeConte?

Joseph Barclay: At the house in Litchfield-street.

Mr Ludlow: Look at the prisoner in the dock. Have you ever seen him at number 27, Litchfield-street?

Joseph Barclay: No. I have never seen the prisoner before. At Litchfield-street I saw only M. LeConte and his assistant M. Grosmont.

Mr Ludlow: And what did you do after M. LeConte had threatened you with exposure?

Joseph Barclay: I called upon Mr Stephen Barber.

Mr Ludlow: And who is Mr Barber?

Joseph Barclay: He is the brother of the husband of my daughter. A very clever young fellow. He is a clerk in the Office of one of the Secretaries of State. I reckoned he would be able to help me, since he has connexions in the government.

Mr Ludlow: Were you not frightened by M. LeConte's threat?

Joseph Barclay: I have served in His Majesty's navy. I have seen death at close quarters. I will not be threatened by a French traitor.

Mr Ludlow: And what happened next?

Joseph Barclay: I kept delivering the letters.

Mr Ludlow: The same as before?

Joseph Barclay: But before I took them to France, I took them to a gentleman in London.

Mr Ludlow: Do you recall the gentleman's name?

Joseph Barclay: It was Mr. Nicholas Gurney.

Mr Ludlow: And what did you do with the letters?

Joseph Barclay: I delivered them to the house of Mr. Gurney and they were returned to me one or two days later.

Mr Ludlow: And during this time you remained in London?

Joseph Barclay: Yes. I was given lodgings, with Mrs. Salt. A most obliging hostess, if I may say so. And not just on account of her mutton pies.

Mr Ludlow: By all accounts. Do you know what happened to the letters you thus surrendered?

Joseph Barclay: I do not know. I presumed they was examined.

Mr Ludlow: And when you received the letters back from Mr. Gurney, what did you do with them?

Joseph Barclay: I returned to Dover and carried them to France as I was directed.

# 6.

> When in the north of England, Richard lodged often with his friend Charles Heywood, a gentleman of some means who lived with his wife and six children outside Penrith. The two had met at the Appleby horse fair of 1802, when Richard saved Heywood from laying out a large sum of money on a bad horse; they remained friends until 1816. On his last visit to Bank Hall, Richard disagreed with Heywood over a trifle; but, each being the sort of man not to give way, the quarrel remained unresolved and Richard never returned.
>
> Montague, *Memoir of Richard Turnbull*

Bank Hall still stood, five miles north of Penrith. According to its website, it was currently undergoing refurbishment before being opened to the public in 2007. Julia rang the number on the website and made enquiries. The new owner, a friendly woman named Dot Kenton, had bought the house with her husband using his redundancy package; they had sold their house in Berkshire; she had worked for the National Trust and so knew about these things; they intended to make a go of it as a local attraction, bring in school groups and the Women's Institute and so on; it was important to do a good marketing job. Yes, in fact she had found a great many papers, in the old library, such a jumble, but she hadn't had time to look at them properly yet. Richard Turnbull? The name did ring a bell. So much stuff, you know. If Julia wanted to come up and see the papers, could she perhaps look at them, put them in some sort of order, assess their importance; how did that sound? Yes, the first week in March would be fine.

Julia arranged three days' leave of absence from the Academy. Then she rang her mother, said she was coming to stay for a few days. Bank Hall was less than twenty miles from her childhood home, and the visit to her parents was long overdue. It made sense to combine

both tasks, though it did not make the idea any more palatable.

Julia drove to Thoresbeck in a hired Ford Ka. Nora Dalton, just returned from evensong, stood in the hallway next to the old teak bureau on which Julia had used to do her homework. Removing her hat, she proffered her powdery and wrinkling cheek, waiting for the regulation kiss, pursing her own red-smeared lips in return. In the narrow sitting room, Julia greeted her father and poured a gin and tonic at the sideboard. The smell of cigarette smoke scratched at the back of her throat. The photograph beside the drinks tray showed her mother, framed in time, looking out with a smile and blessing God for her late miracle, the baby Julia in her arms. And Julia, even as she fervently hoped that she would not become her mother (just twelve years till she was forty!) knew that the smile accused and that she was a disappointment.

A late-conceived child whose parents were now approaching seventy, Julia saw in her mother's ideals of womanhood – nice man, marriage, children – at best tenuous joys, at worst hideous constraints. Aware of her mother's longing for a grandchild, for fond conspiratorial chats about cooking and washing and the irritating habits of men, she could match it only with ill-concealed contempt. Her father said little, walked noiselessly round the house in his patterned carpet slippers, aloof from the simmering volcanics of the women.

Nora lit a cigarette, slowly breathed out a trail of smoke. Her eyes sparkled with pleasure.

'It's so lovely to see you, darling. And how's work?'

'Beginning to take off. There's a lot to do. Finding material at Bank Hall has been a real boost.'

'I meant your teaching.'

'Oh, that. It funds the MA. But I'd rather I didn't have to do it.'

'You can't be a student for ever, you know.'

‘I know that.’

‘Clarissa’s had another pay rise. Thirty-eight thousand now.’

‘How wonderful for Clarissa.’

‘Why don’t you talk to her when you’ve done your Masters? She’d be only too happy to help you find a job.’

‘In an advertising agency?’

‘It’s good money.’

‘It’s not what I want to do. Is she still with that prick? The chief executive?’

‘Don’t be rude, Julia! Harry’s a nice man. They’re getting married in August, we’re all invited. Auntie Poppy’s bought her outfit already. She’s so excited, she can’t wait. Such a gorgeous hat; floppy brim, in cream, with a terracotta ribbon. To match the suit. You will come, won’t you?’

‘Actually,’ said Julia, ‘I wouldn’t be sorry if I never saw Clarissa again.’

Sunday afternoon visits – Auntie Poppy and Uncle James with darling Clarissa, fair-haired and winsome – had in Julia’s memory the same level of significance as her recurrent childhood nightmares. She still occasionally had the nightmares, but at least her life was free of Clarissa. Once, during Sunday tea, Clarissa had picked up Julia’s hardback copy of *David Copperfield*, bought with pocket money saved over weeks, and danced around the dining room with it.

‘What’s this? Is it a love story? Julia’s reading a love story!’ She riffled through the book, opened it at random and read aloud to the assembled adults the account of the death of David’s mother, in such a way that it became a comic turn; rolling her eyes, making exaggerated gestures and declaiming the words in a high-pitched, singsong voice. Everyone laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks, except Julia, who was scolded for not having a sense of humour.

‘Come on Julia,’ said Auntie Poppy. ‘Eat something. You’re too skinny for your own good. It must be all that reading.’ And everyone laughed again. Reading was blamed for many things in the Dalton household. It made children – especially girls – lazy and antisocial.

Bank Hall, explained Dot Kenton at nine-thirty the next morning, was a seventeenth-century farmhouse with later additions. Dot, a large woman with a frizz of dyed-blond hair who wore a loose blouse over a wide denim skirt, led the way down a corridor to a steamy kitchen.

‘This is the newest part of the house, built in the late nineteen-hundreds. And this is my husband, Ken.’ She gestured to a tall, balding man who sat on a threadbare settee opposite an Aga.

‘I’ll leave you to it, then,’ he said, folding up the *Daily Telegraph.* ‘That crossword’s done me in. Dot’s the brains round here; I just do as I’m told.’

‘He used to be a research chemist,’ said Dot as she prepared coffee. ‘They messed him about something awful in his last job. He had a breakdown, they made him redundant, then wouldn’t pay up. We had to get a solicitor. Got the money out of the bastards in the end, but I lived on one meal a day for months. We’re far happier now. We can do more or less what we want here.’ She handed Julia a mug of coffee, strong and bitter. ‘So what about this fella you’re so interested in?’

‘Richard Turnbull? He was a friend of Charles Heywood’s, an itinerant. He stayed with friends and acquaintances, but wasn’t always on very friendly terms with them. He quarrelled with Charles as well after a while.’

‘I’m interested. The more we know about Charles Heywood and his circle, the better. I’ll show you the library.’

It was small and cold, the books untidily shelved and in poor condition.

‘The house had been neglected for years. The last owner had no interest in it, that’s why it

was so run down. But we couldn't have afforded it otherwise. Look, I've put all the papers over here.' She indicated a pile of tattered box files. 'I've not had time to do anything with them. It's only a coincidence that one of the first ones I looked at happened to have Turnbull's name on. You'd be doing me a great favour if you could sort them out.'

Julia opened the top box briefly, noticed with a skip of the heart Richard's signature, the tail of the R extending into an ornate flourish.

'You can stay as long as you like,' said Dot. 'I've got to go and see the bank manager about a loan for the structural work on the tower. That could take all morning.'

Julia, glad to be on her own, started on the first box. Slightly dismayed at the sheer number of documents, she worked solidly till Dot popped her head round the door at one o'clock.

'Come and have some lunch. You must be freezing in here.' Over their tinned vegetable soup and bread rolls, Dot said, 'It could be a gold mine, this place. There's money in history these days. We're converting the old stable into a tea-room and shop. If you've got any ideas for merchandise, let me know. We're not sure what to do with the library.'

It took Julia two days to sort the documents into approximate order. There were receipts, invitations, recipes, notes of sermons (many of the Heywoods had gone into the church) and letters from the early nineteenth century up to the nineteen-fifties. She skim-read and sorted, bundled and labelled, working methodically until everything was in order. Only then did she spread out on the dusty table the sheets written by Richard Turnbull. Numerous letters to Charles Heywood, several pages of autobiography, a few miscellaneous pieces, and a notebook, spineless and battered.

On her last day, Julia kissed her mother goodbye with something approaching affection and arrived at Bank Hall shortly after nine. She took morning coffee with Dot but worked through the rest of the day without a break.

Richard Turnbull was a prolific letter writer, often humorous and satirical, occasionally gossipy.

> Lord Harker is grown fat as a pig. When he sat next to Mrs Taylor at dinner yesterday, he quite eclipsed her, his fat thigh & elbow encroaching so far upon her Place that she was as good as trapped. When – desirous not to give offence – she attempted to move her chair discreetly towards her other neighbour, Captain Johnson, she was quite prevented; he was trod upon her dress! But the poor Lady's face which before had been a picture of Consternation, grew more horrified still when he began to slurp down his soup, and belch like any common bumpkin. This is Mrs Taylor's first season in Town – and she has much to learn about society Manners. No doubt the poor lady thought she would rub shoulders with Superior Beings; perhaps expected a little interesting conversation; of which illusions she was quickly disabused. She is moreover totally unaware that Lord H's appetite for food is not his most fearsome. God have mercy upon her!
>
> Johnson thought her the most delightful creature, though, like most Ladies, she revealed herself to be all Delicacy and no brains, though a pretty enough face. Why is it, that Women are for the most part such silly, affected creatures? There are few exceptions; yet those there are demonstrate what the Sex is capable of. I knew a woman once who, had her education been continued as it had started, might have become my Equal.

The autobiographical pages were difficult to date. Although Turnbull had stated his intention 'to write my life, from beginning to end', the writing had been neither linear nor complete. He wrote on anything: loose sheets of paper, notebooks, the backs of letters he had received, the flyleaves of books – his own or his friends' – and often abandoned the documents where he had written them. How many pieces of his work were scattered about the country – many surely destroyed – it was impossible to tell. One foolscap sheet held several notes:

Whither memories? They exist not outside the Mind, yet they are real, an afterlife of experience.

Born at Manchester in the Year 1775.

My Father's house. —
Walls, constraints. Enclosures, Barriers
Cross not this border.
Death — the last boundary?

Took only my fiddle, my flageolet, a few books.

I have had in me always a need, an instinct, to roam, to let no Place fix me. To cross the threshold. — — (of all Things).
Settled once —

The letters contained accounts of Turnbull's wanderings. Between 1802 and 1810 he travelled the length and breadth of the country, often sleeping rough; a happy-go-lucky young man, an opportunist, full of hope and fun. Between 1810 and 1812 he was living in Clapham. From 1812 to early 1813 there was a gap, after which the letters began again; but they were terse and sad, as if a spark had gone out of him.

4 April 1813

Dear Charles

I have of late been subject to a most awful bout of fever, vomiting and diarrhoea. My Bowels still weak. Two weeks ago I thought I had not long to live, and prepared to take leave of this world, but my Constitution had the better of me. Montague's physician, thinking me as

close to death as I thought myself, administered in turn all the benefits of his Pharmacopoeia – first Henbane, then Laudanum – which had a beneficial but only too temporary effect – and, last of all, threw Caution to the winds and gave me a few grains of the Bhang which he had procured from his wife's father, an eminent physician who tends Sir Jeremy Bowman. But there is nothing to cure what really ails me. The waters of Lethe exist not. I have been dealt a body-blow and I must endure as best I can. I sow misfortune on all I touch. I am the *Heautontimoroumenos*, the Executioner of Self.

Two days ago I called upon Leigh Hunt in the gaol at Horsemonger Lane. He bears up tolerably well under his sentence, though somewhat agitated by the dreadful Noise of the place. The similarity and the difference of our Situations forced itself upon me, and I came away inclined rather to envy than to pity him; imprisoned, certainly, within four walls – yet free of mind and conscience, *his* sentence of fixed duration. My own an imprisonment of mind and Heart, and indefinite. Yet how otherwise could I have acted?

I had thought to be away from this place long since – this locus an Anathema, tho' Montague is life itself to me. As soon as I am well, I shall set out; until such time as I may see you again, God bless you, Charles, and your friend the unfortunate

Richard Turnbull.

'How are you doing? Anything interesting?' Dot's bulk filled the doorway.

'Bogged down. There's such a lot. I'll never read all this in a day. I could do with coming back another time – if that's possible?'

'Well, I've been thinking. If you're prepared to do some work for us, we might come to some arrangement. I thought, if you could design a display on Charles Heywood and Richard Turnbull for the exhibition room, and write a section for the guide book, that sort of thing, we could give you access to the Turnbull papers for a while, a fortnight perhaps. There's a little room you could sleep in downstairs. That would free me up to deal with other things, and

give you time to study the manuscripts.'

It sounded too good to be true. By the time she left on Wednesday evening, Julia had it arranged. Having used most of her holiday allowance from the Academy, she would take unpaid leave under the pretext that her mother was ill and needed care. Her already meagre savings would dwindle, but that could not be helped. She could work during the day on the manuscripts and in the evenings write the material for the Hall. She returned to the Academy for a week, arranged cover for her classes, and was back in Cumbria on the following Monday morning.

# 7.

Wearing heat-proof gloves, Peter Marchmont removed a metal can from his oven and positioned it carefully on a trivet. Into the hot sand inside it he thrust six goose quills. Five minutes later he removed them and polished each in turn with a piece of rough flannel. This done, he carried them upstairs and laid them out on a board on his desk. With a sharp penknife he began to cut a nib on the first quill. It was a delicate job which demanded a steady hand and to which he gave his full attention. He had been surprised, on making his first pen six months ago, by the intricacy of the task. So much practice had been needed, so many feathers wasted before he got it right. There had been the additional problem of cutting exactly the right size and shape of nib; by dogged trial and error, he had found that the handwriting style he required was best achieved with a very fine nib cut on a left-handed quill.

Peter enjoyed the slow evolution, under his now skilled fingers, of this implement simple in form, insubstantial almost, but capable of producing matter of weight and complexity. We have lost, he thought, the concept of process, of progress towards a goal. That which can be bought instantly has no history, no provenance, and therefore no value. It can be discarded, tossed aside, as soon as something newer arrives on the scene. Like fast food it does not satisfy. A man needs to have around him things – artefacts, possessions – which derive from his history and to which he has a lifelong relationship, so that they become a part of his experience of life.

Gently he filed the nib, smoothing it till it was ready for writing. Feather to quill, nib to paper; thus he would weave a tissue of words to reshape and heal the past. The act of writing – the physical scrawling on the page of this hand which was both not his and intimately his – was a literal shriving, an act of transformation.

The first pen finished, he tested it on a sheet of ordinary paper. An idiosyncratic, close scribble, full of undotted Is, uncrossed Ts and flourishing capital Rs. It came naturally now; he was ready. The paper warmly reflected the light of the candle flames. Peter copied for practice a letter written by Richard Turnbull:

Dear Cavanagh

I reached London by the evening coach on Thursday, though I intend not to stay long. It is incumbent upon me to walk. A craving for solitude – which is the essence of Wandering – overtakes me, as certainly as at other times I need the ordered Turbulence of society, the conversation of friends, the tohu-bohu of the Crowds. I have need of the thoughts that only hours of walking can liberate; as my eyes dwell on the majestic calm of the mountains; as I sit at eventide at the edge of a field and hear the cows chomp the grass, the scream of a solitary Peacock; as colour fades and darkness envelops the landscape.

I have come to London only to pay my respects to Mrs. Hanbury, the recent widow of a gentleman acquaintance of my father's, with whom I lodged when a young man, and whose kindness I sore tried by my youthful obstinacy. Mrs H is much changed, but still full of gentleness. I took a dish of Tea with her, and she asked what I did for a livelihood.

'In truth, Madam, I can hardly answer that question,' I replied; 'except that I do what pleases me. I travel, I walk. I read and write. I go where I want, I answer to no one.' She looked at me with fond exasperation, as she had used to do long ago, and said, 'But what do you for income, Richard?' I hastened to explain, lest she think – Heaven forbid! – that I intended to sponge money from her, that I earn a little by my literary commissions – and a little more from my writing for the Review – and that I am happy, my Freedom being my greatest treasure.

On Thursday last, I had the great good fortune to be taken to the Royal Society by Mr Joseph Osborne, where we attended a lecture given by Thomas Young on the Phaenomenon of light – this thing which cannot be seen but which illuminates – I was to have written *all*, but there is

that which Light does not illuminate and which exists only in Darkness. It is Mr Young's belief that Light – like the infinite Sea – has the form of a wave. A fine fellow, and exceeding clever; yet greatly enabled by his vast fortune. His demonstration …

A frenetic knocking sounded from the street below. Peter, realising after some time that it came from his own front door, snuffed out the candles, locked the door behind him and ran down the stairs. The peephole showed a handsome black face, a muscular neck encased in a shirt collar and tie. He unlocked the door and pulled back the bolts one by one, but with haste; that chewing of the lower lip betokened an impatience which, once aroused, would erupt crushingly. Peter could not stomach displays of anger; Drue Paulin's could be brutal.

'Hey, man, you been asleep or something?' Drue's accent was a disconcerting mix of cockney and Jamaican. His father had sailed from Kingston in the early fifties, leaving behind the dazzling sun and dusty pavements of his homeland, and spent the rest of his life in the drizzly grey of an East End which bore the memory and the scars of the Blitz. He died of a stroke in 1985, mercifully not living to see his son's choice of profession.

'You don't have to hammer quite so loud. Anyone could hear.' With a shiver of anticipation, Peter noticed the attaché case at Drue's side.

'I'm a rep., come to show you my new range of kitchenware. That's what I told the old bat next door.' Drue followed Peter up the polished stairs into his kitchen.

'You got any of that cake I like?'

'Which one? The wholemeal carrot or the rich fruit? You seemed to like both last time.'

'Now I'm spoilt for choice. I'll have …' He hesitated, eyes bright with anticipation. The carrot cake got that cream cheese icing on? Yeah? I'll have that. And a nice pot of tea. Strong. Milk and sugar. Tea, man, it's the only thing that keeps out the chill of this English rain.'

Peter suspected that Drue's Jamaican identity, like his accent, was a concoction. The man

had, after all, lived most of his life in London. He fetched a large slice of cake from the café kitchen. It was no good hurrying Drue; he had to be humoured. There were financial negotiations to be undertaken. Besides, there was something almost touching about sitting patiently at his dining table while Drue stuffed his face with cake and drank tea from a Royal Albert cup, his little finger cocked absurdly. If only he's got what I want.

Drue wiped his mouth on his paper napkin.

'That was heaven, man! Where'd you learn to bake cakes like that? Better than my old Ma, bless her.' He still visited his mother once a week in the nursing home in Bethnal Green. 'Now let's see what I got for you.' He lifted up the pilot's case onto the table. Peter's stomach lurched, but his face was blank.

An hour later, he climbed the stairs again; slowly, reverently, a thick sheaf of papers in his arms. Drue had excelled himself. Peter had quibbled over the money for form's sake; the price had been reasonable for what was on offer. He ran his palm softly over the paper, as if to draw forth an exhalation of the past.

'Well, Henri my friend, things are looking up,' he said, addressing the empty chair opposite his desk. He cleared away his handwriting practice and spread out the documents. 'Turnbull was free with his pen, we can say that for him. Four autobiographical pieces – two of them over ten pages long. Letters, various. Notes for the *Treatise on Languages*. Several pages of Greek and Latin. More letters.'

Late into the night Peter read, his candles burning low.

Sunday evening, 18. November 1810, Clapham

My dear Beaumont

I have been settled here for several months – much to my Surprize – you well know my aversion to staying in one place. There is, however, much here to my advantage. I am lodged

in this pleasant Village at the home of Mr Robert Bellas, who employs me as Amanuensis & Factotum – for which services he pays me handsomely. Having no family – his wife died ten years ago of a fever – Mr Bellas contents himself with affairs of State and scientific work. His purpose in employing me was, I suspect, to have at his disposal someone with whom he may talk on matters which are of interest to him – an Arrangement which suits us both; for he is a man whose knowledge and discerning tastes are matched only by his kindness and Benevolence.

My generous allowance permits me to repay my Debt to you, & I have therefore sent, by Mr. Ephraim Fairfax, who set out for Manchester yesterday, the 10£ note of which you have no doubt long since despaired. I send also a copy of The Leviathan, which I offer in gratitude for your Friendship. I had it from Mr Ackermann's in the Strand, where I met, by chance, Mr Coleridge, a gentleman much different from the Idea I had formed of him. A poet of fearsome Intellect, but not untouched by human cares or Weaknesses; which inclines me rather towards him. We discussed nigh on an hour (taking shelter from the rain, which lashed against the window panes) the nature and origin of Man's soul – on which points, as you may imagine, we differed greatly, but without Rancour.

I go often to London, both on business for Mr Bellas and on my own account. I have been invited to dine with several of his acquaintance – his sphere includes men of Government as well as of Learning – he is well connected due to his work in the office of the Secretary of State. I am welcomed in these Circles – imagine Beaumont! I, a Jacobin at heart, & a wandering Nobody to boot, welcomed amongst lords and Men of state. If I were not so near the end of this paper, I would tell you a tale or two; but must reserve that pleasure until such time as I write you again; until then I remain,

with sincere Respect

R. Turnbull

Thursday morning –

My dear Burnet

I – who am unaccustomed to move amongst the Dressy and expensive – was much amused by your Dinner party yesterday. If I may make so bold as to suggest an Improvement for future such Events – you might increase the Pleasure of certain of your guests, by inviting some who have Wit as well as Fortune. Yours, R.T.

Dear Miss Fitzroy — I thank you for your kind invitation, & accept with both joy and alacrity. You may be assured, that I shall wing myself, like Phaethon, to your doorstep at seven-thirty precisely this evening, scrubbed and dressed so as to create the most favourable impression with your Aunt, to whom I beg to be remembered.

Friday afternoon, 2 o'clock

Dear Banks

Fear not, I shall be at your house at 9 or 10 of the clock tomorrow, at which time we shall be able to discuss which of your poems to include in the volume. Since I shall have walked the full distance from this village – I am presently in some distress and have not the wherewithal to take the Coach – may I suggest that a fair recompense for the joy of my Company & the advantages of my intellect will be: 1st, a Dish of tea; 2nd, a large portion of Mrs. Greig's plum pudding; and 3rdly, that I may dine with you tomorrow afternoon before returning here. I promise you, that I shall wear my best – *id est*, my other – breeches and coat, AND that I will not on this occasion affright your household with tales of War and Revolution; if, however, you consider me unworthy to grace your dining room – I shall happily sit at a corner in the kitchen and fill my stomach with Mrs G's scraps.

My best respects to Mrs Banks and to the little pudding Robert. R. T.

February 1st, 1813

My dear Elizabeth

I write to you with Chagrin, and for the last time, in great agitation of mind, –

I have done that which is applauded as a great and noble Deed – have been congratulated in drawing room and tavern – but to me it is an Act as foul & hateful as it was necessary –

Can we ever truly know another? I thought I knew a man – with whom I shared many a pleasant conversation, and a jug of Claret – and then –

May God forgive me, Judas!

I am sullied by this act. I have betrayed a friend.

I leave tomorrow, if my Health hold. London and its environs are no longer to my taste, and those whom I love are best without me. I travel North; the sole hope I have of silencing the tumult in my head is to walk over fields and hills, to sleep beneath the stars, so to pommel my body that I forget who I am and what I have done.

I – the old I – the new is not to be known – wish you well. With sincerest good-wishes & Respect, believe me, ~~who in different Times might have been something~~

your Friend, the unfortunate

Richard Turnbull.

'Well, my friend,' said Peter quietly, 'we have him, by his own admission.'

# 8.

After ten days at Bank Hall, Julia had transcribed less than half the material. She had enquired about photocopying, but Dot was against it. On the Thursday evening she was finishing the information for the guide book when there was a brief knock; Dot poked her head round the door.

'Got a minute, dear?' She sat on the narrow bed, her hands in her lap, her head on one side. 'Ken and I have come to a decision. We're going to have to sell the papers. And the library as a matter of fact.'

'Oh. But …'

'It makes sense. We need the money to put into the rest of the house. The library won't attract people. We need thirty thousand to repair the tower, and the bank will only lend us half. Nobody wants to come and look at old books and papers.'

'But …'

'In fact we've got someone lined up for the Turnbull papers already. A collector, I think. I wouldn't have said they were worth much, but you were obviously interested in them, so I thought why not someone else with more money? Stroke of luck that was, you turning up. And sorting them out for me.'

'But they'll be lost.'

'To be honest, that's not my concern. We're running a business here.'

'How much are you asking for them?'

'Six thousand. As I said, we've had an offer. Nearly bit our hand off. He's coming up next Wednesday to view the papers. Just had an e-mail from him.' She wafted a sheet of paper at Julia.

Julia could not hope to raise six thousand pounds in four days. But the alternative was to

let the papers go.

'What if …,' she was thinking on her feet now, never her strong point; her heart was racing and she felt sick. 'What if I paid you for some of the papers I want – does he know, this collector – does he know exactly what documents you're selling?'

'Not exactly. We advertised using your description of the papers – the one you so kindly wrote for us. So a couple are mentioned in detail, the rest are just as you described them: documents Richard Turnbull wrote at Bank Hall and letters to his friend Charles Heywood.'

'Suppose I paid you – say a thousand – for a few that I want? They can't be that valuable after all – an obscure travelling scholar …'

'Ah, but they obviously are. To people like you. And him.' Dot smiled placidly.

'But you could still sell the rest at the original price, and he'd be none the wiser. If he's that keen, he'll pay, and think he's got a bargain. And you'd end up with seven thousand instead of six.'

'Two. We'd want two thousand. And the money in cash, by Monday.'

'Fifteen hundred. That's still a big profit. And I want to stay until Monday evening.'

'Done. I don't know what you see in them, but one man's meat, as they say. As long as you're out of here by Tuesday.'

She must be mad. Four days to raise fifteen hundred pounds, and just five hundred in her savings account. She lay awake that night, angry and desperate; and when she slept, the dream came. She was falling, flailing; gripped and pushed, gasping endlessly for breath; tumbling in a black maelstrom over which an angry god bellowed.

She has no name, the dead baby who inhabits these dreams; no face, no physical presence. She is merely a long-forgotten loss which erupts periodically from the obscure depths of memory.

Julia would have been glad, when she woke, heart pounding, to reach out and touch Miles, let his embrace infuse her aching body with warmth. But she had made of Miles, by an unexplained necessity, a fugitive and occasional lover. She slept again, and when she woke she knew what she would do. She rang her parents, arranged to see them that evening.

'I've got some news,' she said.

She had rehearsed her speech but still it sounded false. The words, 'I'm getting engaged,' were as foreign to Julia's vocabulary as marriage was to her life plan. They were bound to know it was a lie. But they were overjoyed. It was what they wanted to hear. Julia was a better liar than she thought. Nora, with a look which simultaneously angered and accused Julia, beamed at her with delight and relief.

'The thing is, I need some money. We need some money. A deposit on a flat. If Aunt Tricia comes home …'

'How much, love?'

'Two thousand?'

'Dad will go to the bank and draw it out tomorrow. Now, let's have some bubbly.' Nora ferreted in the sideboard, triumphantly brought out a bottle of Lambrusco, lit a cigarette and gabbled excitedly. Had they set a date? What about a ring? It would be a white wedding, wouldn't it? She must phone Auntie Poppy immediately. Julia sat on the sofa in a daze, sipped the warm, sweet liquid; a small penance, sickly and nauseating like the lie she had told.

'Tell us about him. When will we see him?' He could be anything they liked. In order to find the facts she so desperately wanted about Richard Turnbull, Julia had turned her own life into a fiction.

'I'm very busy at work right now. I'm going to Paris next month. I want to finish my MA before we get married.'

On her way back to Bank Hall, she stopped at the local pub and bought a bottle of Merlot. She sat up till three in the morning, drinking and transcribing the papers she was not going to keep. A vigil, a farewell. She had three days. She no longer ate with Dot and Ken; she bought bananas, nuts and dried fruit in the village shop. By working flat out – and smuggling some pages out to photocopy in the local library – she managed to finish the transcription.

On the Sunday evening she ran out of paper. It was seven o'clock; the shop would be long shut. Dot and Ken were out; she went into the kitchen, ransacked their printer. On the table she saw the printout of an e-mail:

> Marchmont_1813@wanadoo.co.uk.
>
> Further to your e-mail of 24th March, I should be pleased to view the documents in question on Wednesday, 3rd April at 6 p.m. Please apprise me of your full address, and confirm that if I purchase (in cash) I shall be able to take immediate possession of the documents.

Julia paid Dot the next day, and drove to Penrith, where she checked into a cheap bed and breakfast. Before making the journey back to New Cross, she needed to sleep, to reflect on what she had done. Lying to her parents was surely justified, given that, had they known its true purpose, they would probably have refused to lend her the money. She would pay it back one day. This was more important than a wedding. But her mother would be bitterly disappointed when the engagement was broken off. She would not even get to see the ring, let alone meet the fiancé.

But that was not all. Amongst the papers which Julia spread out on the orange bedspread that evening was a notebook over which she had not negotiated with Dot. It had been on the table in her room at Bank Hall the night Dot came to tell her about selling the collection, covered by an Ordnance Survey map of the area on which Julia had been plotting Richard Turnbull's travels. She had left it there during the following days, said nothing about it. It

was a deception of inaction and she had got away with it. Dot had driven a hard bargain, had no idea what she was selling; why should Julia not have the notebook too? It had not been a formal transaction; there was no paperwork, no receipt. Even if Dot realised the notebook was missing, even if the police came knocking, nothing could be proved.

Now she gazed at the worn, dirty cover, the mottled first page full of the unmistakable handwriting.

Richard Turnbull's commonplace book, starting in the year 1809.

> When the streets run with Blood, the Mob shouts for the old ways again and who can blame it? Terror causes heads to fall, but seldom those which ought. To purge a Society of its undesirables – of all Ranks – could but serve that society. Were the streets to run with the blood of tyrant and oppressor, deceitful priest and vicious Landlord! But if the innocent go to the Guillotine while tyrants live on, then what use bloodshed?

> How welcoming the lights of an Inn glimpsed from the road; the anticipation of a roaring fire, the solitude of dining with only my book for company! Overhead, like a silent friend, the star Algol, the demon star, which like a woman is inconstant and changes visibly in brightness. Goodricke said that this fluctuation is caused by duplicity – that Algol is eclipsed by a companion which thus diminishes it; but who can tell?

Julia groaned as she flicked through the book. Most of the later material was written in Greek; page upon page of unintelligible writing which she had no hope of understanding. Her knowledge of Greek began and ended with a few of the letters of the alphabet picked up from school maths and physics. It served her right, perhaps. She closed the book, wrapped it carefully in a jumper and stowed it in her small suitcase.

# 9.

On the rare occasions that Peter Marchmont left London, it was in the service of his friend Henri de Saint-Gilles.

On this Tuesday evening he stood for a moment, as he did every evening, in front of his shelf of blue earthenware teapots, gazing at the polished convex surfaces which reflected an image of his café, and himself within it. Then he hurried upstairs to his living room, checked the train times on the Internet. He wrote a list of instructions for George, the young man who would look after the café in his absence; he would be away for the whole of the next afternoon and evening. In his study he removed from a locked drawer a thick envelope which he placed carefully in a black leather briefcase.

He went to bed early. Tomorrow would be a long day; the Penrith train would not reach Euston till one in the morning.

Peter had been twenty-seven when he finally located the site of Henri de Saint-Gilles's arrest. It was a Monday afternoon in June 1979, a day when the rain poured down till the gutters overflowed, and he was still euphoric from the finalisation of his divorce. The Veggie Burger was a run-down vegetarian café in a grey and dismal back street. Piled on the pavement outside were boxes of rubbish, from which protruded rotting leeks and carrots. Inside, Peter sat at one of the green formica tables, alongside students in long skirts and flared jeans, and ate a soggy cauliflower bake. The Veggie Burger had struggled on for many years, until Peter bought it in 1999. By then, Clapham had come up in the world; there was potential for an upmarket café in this now sunny and inviting place.

The building which Peter renamed the Blue Teapot had in the early nineteenth century been a thriving coffee house frequented by radical intellectuals, and run by one Joseph

Turner. Henri de Saint-Gilles and Richard Turnbull had been amongst its regulars. At least two of its customers had been arrested and tried for sedition on the basis of words they had been overheard to utter on the premises; denounced by others on the lookout for French sympathisers or anti-monarchists. Peter was less certain of its later history. At some point it ceased to function as a coffee house and became a private dwelling, before being turned back into a café in the early sixties.

Peter had completely refitted the building, disclosing the original features hidden by its twentieth-century renovators. One of his happiest finds was in the café itself: he had broken through a flimsy plasterboard wall on which had been hung successive layers of wallpaper – purple-flowered, orange-swirled and, last of all, a phantasmagoric abstract in brown, yellow and pink – to reveal a section of original wood panelling which, on further investigation, extended round the room. He had hired builders and decorators, cajoled and threatened, paid good money for jobs well done, helped out himself where necessary. The café and his first-floor living quarters had been ready in three months. The top-floor study, however, he had fitted out himself, alone. Beneath the years' choking layers of dust and cobwebs, the old packing crates, broken furniture and abandoned possessions, he had seen its potential. Peter was good with his hands, a perfectionist; he had brought with him the tools he had salvaged from his marital home and, thankful now for the skills honed by those endless months of DIY, he set to work on his own account.

It had taken eighteen months of evening work to get the room shipshape. As he stood in white overalls and face mask over the slowly-vibrating floor-sander, he imagined he was peeling away the past; when he arrived at the original wood, which he varnished, re-sanded and varnished again, he realised he had reached a bedrock, a zero hour from which all further events were to be reckoned.

He trawled the antique shops for period furniture, bought upright chairs, a dark green

leather Chesterfield – slightly scuffed but smooth and firm – a wing chair, bookcases. The huge mahogany desk which now stood in the centre of the room he had bid for at Sotheby's. He painstakingly arranged the many books and documents he already possessed which related to his quest. It was in this room, at last now purged and furnished as it might have been in 1812, that Henri de Saint-Gilles materialised.

Peter had at first taken Saint-Gilles's apparition for an illusion, a function of his desire to know this man he so resembled. He later understood that the ghost was real, an entity in himself. He could not be summoned; Peter had no control – even of supplication – over the night-time visits; had no recourse but to wait patiently for the dark chill nights of November, around the anniversary of Saint-Gilles' arrest.

The first visit had taken place one Saturday night three months after the work on the study had been completed. The Blue Teapot had been open for nearly two years and was starting to make a small profit; a fact of some moment for Peter, who had never been successful in anything before. At fifty, he was perhaps too long in the tooth to have taken on such a risky venture, but it was one last chance to prove himself. Two fingers up to the masters who had written on his school reports, 'Marchmont is a lazy and devious boy who could well end up at Her Majesty's Pleasure,' 'A lame elephant could do better at cricket,' 'Peter would do well to take his nose out of his books and engage in social intercourse with the rest of the form.' Two fingers up to his father and mother, the wife for whom none of his efforts made the grade. He gave the café his all, not knowing if that would be enough, but knowing that anything less would be insufficient.

Working thirteen hours at a stretch, he was exhausted when he climbed the stairs at the end of the day. Most nights he went straight to bed. Sometimes he was so tired he did not undress, but lay down fully clothed, to wake the next morning with the alarm shrilling in his ears. But on Sundays the café did not open till eleven; on this November night he decided to

spend an hour in his study before going to bed. In the stillness, above the street, far from the hum of traffic on the South Circular, he felt an anticipation, an electric disturbance of the air. He had carried up a bottle of old Burgundy; it was while he had his glass to his lips that he became aware, through its distorting and magnifying surface, of the ghost sitting motionless, almost mocking, in the wing chair opposite the desk. Dizzy with pleasure, Peter whispered,

'You have come at last.' Putting the glass down on the desk, he added, 'I bid you welcome.'

Saint-Gilles bowed his head in acknowledgement.

'You see I have been expecting you,' continued Peter, indicating the room with an outstretched arm. 'I bought that chair for you. I knew you would come.'

'You have my thanks.'

'You see I have not been idle. Now I live in this place – frequented by you and that traitor Turnbull – now my physical home is my spiritual home also, I can begin.'

'And you know, do you not,' said Saint-Gilles, 'what it is that you have to do.' It was Peter's turn to bow his head.

He was unsure how long he sat that night in the ghost's presence. He merely became aware that, like the lingering glow of a sunset, it had imperceptibly faded. He sat up all night in a state of ecstasy. He had been blessed.

# 10.

The painting showed a chain-mailed knight who knelt with bowed head before an open-air altar; above him, a vastness of grey-white cloud. In the silence of the bookshop, with its polished wood shelves and floor, the books of brown and gold leather arranged in neat ranks, dust motes tumbling in a shaft of light from the window, Julia felt as if she had stepped from the busy Paris street into an enchanted garden.

'He's about to set out on crusade,' said a voice behind her; a tall man of sixty-five or seventy, his suit well-cut, his hair the grey of Cumbrian slate. 'I'm an atheist, myself; and the Crusades were ungodly to say the least; but I like the contrast: the smallness of the knight, the immensity of the sky. So it is for us all.' He held out his hand. 'Jean-Michel Fournier. Welcome.'

Her trip to Paris was the one thing Julia had not lied to her parents about. Over coffee one morning, in the Academy's staff room full of threadbare arm chairs and scratched tables, Julia had bemoaned to one of her French colleagues the ever-widening remit of her research, and Richard Turnbull's apparent connection with an elusive French émigré.

'You should talk to Jean-Michel Fournier,' said Yvette. 'He's an old friend of my father's; he runs a sort of historical club, in Paris. He's a real character, owns a bookshop on the rue Jacob, in St Germain des Prés. You'll love it. There's bound to be someone he knows who can help you. I'll give him a ring.'

So, to her team leader's surprise – Julia seldom volunteered for anything – she had put her name forward for a secondment at the Academy's Paris branch, to cover a month's sick leave in April. The trip, expenses paid, would be an opportunity to visit Jean-Michel Fournier; if it turned out to be fruitless, she would have lost nothing. Glad to have her life reduced for a

while to a fifth-floor bedsit overlooking the Place de la Contrescarpe, and to live from the perspective of another language, she left London with enthusiasm.

She had made an appointment to meet M. Fournier at six on the first Thursday of her stay. Dodging the traffic in the Place de la Concorde, she wondered if Saint-Gilles had in fact fled the guillotine which once stood here, or if that story was an invention to mask a more sinister truth. How was she to unweave fact and fiction in this business?

'Yvette told me you had a problem of a historical nature,' said Jean-Michel Fournier. 'I was delighted to hear from her. Her father and I did our military service together.'

Julia explained briefly her need to find information about Henri de Saint-Gilles.

'My personal area of interest is the early Middle Ages. But there are two people – Yvette told you about my society?'

'She mentioned it.'

'There are two people connected to the society who may be able to help you. Carmen Broussard is one, but she's a semi-recluse and rarely attends. Sits at home writing poems no-one is permitted to read. I will give you her address; she might deign to correspond with you – though by letter only; I doubt she knows what a computer is, and she's always hated the telephone. The other person is my nephew Mathias. He lectures at the Institut d'Histoire de la Révolution française. If he can't help you, I'll be surprised. In fact, the society is meeting tomorrow night, he will be there. Please do come. Eight-thirty, at my apartment. No, of course you won't be intruding.' He wrote the two addresses on a sheet of paper.

The next evening, Julia walked from the Place de la Contrescarpe and found the building without difficulty. Jean-Michel lived on the third floor and was at the door to greet her.

'Meet the members of the Society of the Fifteenth of December,' he said. There were a

dozen people in the long living room, none of them younger than forty-five. One of the walls was filled floor to ceiling with bookshelves. 'We're an informal group of amateur historians; we meet once a fortnight to discuss the projects we're working on.'

'And to put the world to rights,' said a tall man whose tie could have been a crude test for astigmatism.

'And so Jean-Michel can flog us the books he can't get rid of.' A white-haired man with the mischievous face of a ten-year-old.

'Which keeps him in wine for at least a day or two.' Véronique, the only woman of the group.

'Wine which I liberally share with you.' Jean-Michel.

'In fact,' said a man of about thirty-five, who had run up the stairs after Julia and joined the conversation as he rushed through the door, 'it is just an excuse for a lot of wine and hot air. Not to mention the dreaded onion tart.'

'Sacrilege!' shouted a man who was standing in a corner peering into a large book. 'He dares to attack the noble symbol of our society.'

'Don't be too hard on him, please,' said Jean-Michel, 'or he might play his cello.'

'You're spared; I've left it at the university. I'm sorry to be late. The traffic was awful.'

'Julia, may I present my nephew Mathias? Professional historian, authority on the Revolution, the Diogenes of our little group.' Like his uncle, he was tall. He wore a long grey jacket of curious style; his hair was swept back into a careless pony tail.

'Not that I have any objection to food or wine in general, you understand,' he said as he shook Julia's hand; 'nor even to a little hot air. Onion tart, however, is another matter entirely.'

'You do us an injustice,' said Jean-Michel; 'as well you know.'

They sat down to eat. The distressed rectangular table had been neatly laid with silver

cutlery, white plates, red damask napkins and glasses which sparkled under the light from an ornate chandelier.

'What is the significance of the fifteenth of December?' asked Julia.

'You'd never guess,' said Mathias, pouring her a glass of wine, full-bodied and mellifluous.

'I presumed it was a date in French history that I'd not come across.'

'You could say that.'

'Almost thirty years ago,' said Jean-Michel ponderously; 'on Wednesday, 15 December 1976, my wife of seventeen years packed her bags and left me. An obscure date, perhaps, but one worth celebrating. We drink to liberation,' he said, raising his glass. 'I founded this society soon after. As well as having a passion for history, its members have to be either separated or divorced. The only exception is Carmen Broussard, who's never married – though heaven knows she's been abandoned enough times – and Mathias, but he's not really a member; we just use him for his expertise.'

'And the onion tart?'

Laughter erupted round the table.

'My sainted ex-wife couldn't stand onions,' said Jean-Michel. 'For seventeen years they were forbidden me; even in restaurants, she used to turn her dainty little nose up. Said they made my breath stink. So I serve onion tart every fortnight at society meetings: a declaration of freedom, a point of honour.'

Julia warmed to this eccentric group, felt herself accepted. Asked about her own research, she gave a summary of what she knew about Richard Turnbull's life, his possible involvement with Saint-Gilles.

'I feel that I simultaneously know the man intimately and don't know him at all.'

'Perhaps that's the only way we can know,' said Véronique.

‘Your Turnbull sounds very like my son,’ said a rotund little man with a neat square beard; ‘full of ideas but never coming up with the goods.’

The next morning, waking late with a blazing headache, Julia vaguely recollected being handed into a taxi, the early morning streets whizzing past. She remembered she had a meeting with Mathias Fournier that morning at the Sorbonne. She breakfasted at a café in the square; the April morning was warm, golden yellow sunlight on faded shutters. Spring was gentle here, a caress with no obligations. As she brushed the croissant crumbs from her jeans, her memory jumped back five years. If only things could have turned out differently. But she could not have acted otherwise.

Mathias Fournier’s office, when she at last found it, was neither large nor tidy. The bookcases were crammed, the books in no apparent order; the desk piled with papers, files, more books. She sat, student-like, in the chair opposite his desk; he cleared a space between them, moving a pile of books to one side.

‘I must compliment you on your French.’

‘My degree was in French and history. I appreciate you giving up your Saturday morning to see me.’

‘It’s not a problem. I work at the weekend, anyway. I’ve got time on my hands. You said last night this character Saint-Gilles was executed as a spy?’

‘Yes. In 1813. Two years before the battle of Waterloo.’

A vague smile. ‘I do hope that’s not a loaded comment.’

‘God, no. But I almost feel with this French spy thing as if I’ve descended into a sort of James Bond scenario – when all I was doing was researching an obscure radical scholar. I have to keep reminding myself that it’s not as far-fetched as is might seem. The war had dragged on for almost twenty years by then – the country was exhausted – all sorts of stuff

was going on under the surface.'

'What can you tell me about him?'

'At his trial, he claimed he was born into the minor aristocracy in the Charente region, although he spent some time in Paris. He fled to England in 1793, lived there peacefully until 1812, when he was arrested on suspicion of running a spy ring. But the facts presented at the trial may not be true. I doubt if either the defence or the prosecution verified the claims he made about his background.' She pulled a face. 'I may be on a wild goose chase.'

'Anything else?'

'He used two names in England; first, de Lessac; then reverted to his birth name Saint-Gilles. His defence claimed that de Lessac wasn't a false name, but the name that went with an estate he had inherited from an uncle. Apparently it was normal to take the name that went with the estate.'

'That is correct. But …' He ran his fingers through his hair, and smiled at her. 'You may, indeed, Julia, be on a very wild goose chase. If both names were false, it will be almost impossible to trace him.'

'I know.'

'You believe that Saint-Gilles was convicted justly?'

'I have no evidence to the contrary.'

'What do your guts tell you?'

She frowned and said, 'I don't have much faith in intuition. Even my own. I favour hard evidence.'

'But sometimes it is intuition which leads us to the hard evidence.' He took a notebook and a fountain pen from his jacket pocket, made a few notes.

'Leave it with me. I'll see what I can do.'

*

Ten days later, he rang her, said he had some information, if she would care to visit his office after work that day. She was late leaving the Academy; when she arrived, he was playing his cello; the plangent tones of a Bach suite filled the stairwell. He played indifferently; the notes were all there, but there was a formlessness, a truculence in the way he crashed the bow down on the strings, which jolted her. As she leant against the wall, waiting for the end of the movement, catching her breath, she fell into a daze. Behind her closed eyelids she saw Richard Turnbull, striding the fields, riding from Clapham to London, playing his fiddle at country inns and in society drawing rooms. According to Montague,

> Dick was much taken with the music of Beethoven, and not afraid to mangle the music to make it fit his own mood. That evening he took from his pocket a sheet of music, which he said Miss Fitzroy absolutely must play with him. Poor Miss Fitzroy! though she played Clementi with great skill, she was more than a little unnerved by this new Beethoven. She made a valiant effort, but was a poor second to Richard, who confidently coaxed from his old violin the most exquisite sounds. Afterwards he said, that Beethoven wrote against, as well as with, the spirit of his times, and that was the essence of all art. He spoke with intensity, and Miss Fitzroy's eyes were ablaze. I fancy she was half in love with Richard; and who would not have been when he played and spoke thus passionately?

As the last note faded, Julia knocked on the door.

'Your arrival is well timed,' said Mathias. She did not disabuse him. 'My wife used to say I ought to give it up on humanitarian grounds, but it helps me think.'

'Does she still think that?'

'She's stopped saying it. Perhaps I'm improving. Now, look at this.' He put down his bow, leant the cello against a bookcase, and picked up a book. 'This is the *Almanach impérial* for 1808. As well as the usual calendrical information, the *Almanach* had a complete

listing for the whole of the country of all civil and military posts, from the Emperor down, with other useful facts, like on what days the post coaches left – or what to wear at the Imperial Court during a period of mourning.' He opened the book at a page he had marked. 'There is an Henri Saint-Gilles – note the lack of *particule* – listed here as a government official, a judge in a county court, in Poitiers. Normally only the surnames are listed; but one of the other judges was also called Saint-Gilles – a relation, perhaps – so the forenames are given. I've checked in the library archives and he held the same position in 1805, 1806 and 1807. But not after 1808. So, if it's the same Saint-Gilles …' – he handed her the book –

'His story about living in England between 1793 and 1812 is at least partially untrue,' said Julia.

'Indeed.'

'He did go into the law. Henri, that is.'

'How on earth did you get into all this? It seems very complex for an MA.'

'I was seduced by a fragment of Richard Turnbull's autobiography. It was written in a book given to me by an old lady.'

'Ah,' he said, leaning his chair back against the bookcase, his foot against the desk; 'the irresistible lure of the historical text.' She could not tell if he was being sarcastic.

# 11.

## The trial of Henri Jacques de Saint-Gilles

## II.

Sir Mortimer King was sworn, and examined by Mr. Field.

Mr Field: You are employed by Lord Sidmouth, one of the secretaries of state, are you not?

Sir Mortimer: Yes.

Mr Field: Did you employ Mr Nicholas Gurney to carry letters between Joseph Barclay and yourself?

Sir Mortimer: I did.

Mr. Field: And what did you with the letters?

Sir Mortimer: I opened them.

Mr. Field: Did you have them copied?

Sir Mortimer: I copied some myself. The others were copied by Mr Bellas. On a few occasions, there were more documents than we could quickly copy between us; I then called in Mr Ephraim Miller, a scribe, to help.

Mr. Field: What happened when the documents had been copied?

Sir Mortimer: I returned them to Mr Gurney, who delivered them to Joseph Barclay.

Mr. Field: Describe the content of the documents.

Sir Mortimer: They were documents recounting the state of the navy and the army in several places along the south coast of England.

Mr. Field: What did you conclude from the documents?

Sir Mortimer: That we were dealing with a spy.

Mr. Field: The letters were all written in the same hand-writing?

Sir Mortimer: Yes. It was presumed that he made a report of intelligence gathered from several sources.

Mr. Field: You presumed there were different sources?

Sir Mortimer: It was logical to assume so. There were papers relating to our defensive and offensive forces, gathered from different places. In one bundle, there was information given about the garrison at Dover, the naval yards at Portsmouth and Devonport; and a plan of the redoubt at Eastbourne. Once there was some information relating to French prisoners of war held captive in the north. It was unlikely that all this could be gathered by one man with such regularity.

Mr. Field: What was the regularity?

Sir Mortimer: In the two years to the summer of 1812, there was a packet of letters leaving for France about once every month.

Mr. Field: So you assumed what?

Sir Mortimer: That there were several intelligencers.

Mr. Field: Did you take steps to apprehend the persons concerned?

Sir Mortimer: We succeeded in identifying LeConte and two others who worked for him: Roger duBois and Charles Giroudet. But we understood there to be a ringleader, above LeComte. We therefore held back. We knew that if we were to apprehend his men, in all likelihood he would merely set up again with a different circle. I suggested we employ an intelligencer of our own to root out this traitor. Mr Bellas had at that time a gentleman in his employ whom he held in great esteem, and who was highly regarded also by Lord Alexander. It was Lord Alexander's suggestion that we employ him in this capacity.

Mr. Field: And this gentleman's name was?

Sir Mortimer: Mr Richard Turnbull. Mr Turnbull lived at that time in Clapham, but came often to London and had Mr Bellas' confidence. He had moreover

been used to a life of wandering. He therefore not only had exhaustive knowledge of all parts of the kingdom, but would not draw suspicion to himself in suddenly leaving London to travel the country. By all accounts he was a trustworthy man.

Mr. Field: And did Mr Turnbull accept the commission?

Sir Mortimer: He did.

Mr. Field: He was paid for the work?

Sir Mortimer: He was given expenses. He was promised a handsome payment upon successful completion of the affair. I am informed, however, that he refused finally to accept the payment.

Mr. Field: Do you know the reason?

Sir Mortimer: I do not.

Mr. Field: Are you aware of an incident which concerned Mr Turnbull and which took place on the night of May the 19th, 1812?

Sir Mortimer: I believe that on that night, Mr Turnbull was attacked by footpads in the vicinity of Drury Lane.

Mr. Field: Was this before or after Mr Turnbull was retained by the Secretary of State to track the alleged spy?

Sir Mortimer: It was about two weeks after. But it was not the first time.

Mr. Field: Mr Turnbull had been attacked previously?

Sir Mortimer: I believe he was attacked on the common at Clapham some time before this.

# 12.

‘Bloody hell, it’s cold up here! And that wind!’

‘Don’t be such a baby, Miles! It’s exhilarating. Come on!’ She took his gloved hand in hers and pulled on his arm, forcing him to make the last few yards of the ascent.

‘Tell me again why we’re doing this. We could have had a weekend in the sun.’

‘Richard Turnbull came here – possibly in pursuit of a French spy. French prisoners of war were brought up here to quarry the rock. That’s why it’s called the Roaches – it’s a corruption of *les rochers.*’

Richard Turnbull had travelled to the Roaches in June 1812, as Napoleon was preparing to invade Russia, and England was reeling from the combined effects of a protracted war, Luddite violence and the assassination of its Prime Minister. It was a

> desolate, rough, cold Place high in the Staffordshire countryside; where the wind howls around and through one & scarcely can be found any Shelter. The poor wretches are set to quarry the stone from dawn till dusk; I cannot but be sorry for them, – some mere Boys, cold and frightened; their uniforms in tatters. They looked upon me with suspicion when I addressed them in their native Tongue; but some, glad to hear it once more not botched and mocked, were happy to speak to me in their short meal break of water and old bread – asked me news, of the War, of their homeland. But I could get nothing out of them the first day. The next I returned with fresh bread and half a Derbyshire cheese (easily smuggled past their gaolers with the aid of a bank-note); which they fell upon though they declared it strange stuff.

Almost twenty years later, in April 1830, he had described a recent visit to the same area:

> I walked half a day before I found the rock upon which, in that terrible time, I had carved her

Initials. – The awful suspicion beginning to present itself, I had wished some remembrance of Stability. The initials were but little eroded. How I wish I could say the same for myself! What is our life, William, that we start with such ideals and end up with a little paltry mound of disappointment and Chagrin?

The rocks, huge boulders eroded over time into grotesque shapes, were probably much the same as in Turnbull's day, though there was no sign of any carved initials. It was still desolate, if you discounted the hordes of walkers and climbers, and cold for the time of year; though today the sun shone, glinting on a small pool where they stopped to eat their sandwiches and drink coffee from a steel flask.

Over dinner in their hotel, Miles laughed and said,

'I'll be glad when you've finished this research, Julia. You're obsessed.'

She put down her knife and fork and looked him in the face. 'I could quite happily spend the rest of my life doing this.'

'What's so attractive about a loser who's been dead more than a hundred and fifty years?'

'He wasn't a loser.'

'Prove to me he wasn't.' He folded his arms across his white T-shirt.

'OK, so he didn't conform, didn't have a regular job, wandered about mixing with high and low, living hand-to-mouth sometimes. But his lifestyle – intentionally or not – commented on the society he lived in. By refusing to live what was considered to be a respectable life, he threw the social norms into relief.'

'Like the hippies in the sixties?'

'I suppose so.'

'Fair enough, but you're still obsessed.'

'If that's what you call being obsessed. I don't like being kept in the dark.'

'You make it sound like a conspiracy.'

‘That’s sometimes how it feels. I have to know. It’s the way I am.’

‘Have you got any plans at all? For your life? I don’t see you as a modern-day Richard Turnbull. Fields don’t come with ensuite bathrooms.’

‘Very funny. I half wish I had the guts for that. We’re all so bloody conformist nowadays, aren’t we? I want to do a PhD. After that, I don’t know.’

‘Can you finance it?’

‘Probably. Part-time. As long as I can keep the flat, and my job, I should be fine.’

He put his hand on hers. ‘I just don’t want to be second fiddle to a dead dropout.’

‘Play.’

‘What?’

‘The expression is *play second fiddle*. Not *be*.’ She withdrew her hand.

‘Play, then. I’m tired, I’m going to bed.’

Julia sat in the green chintz lounge and drank coffee. So she was obsessed; well, then, what was the problem? It wasn’t a crime. She had to discover the facts, to lay bare the quiddity of Richard Turnbull’s life. Just as, years ago, she had been driven to discover a part of her own story which, but for her determination, might never have been brought to light. It was a relentless compulsion which she described with the French word *acharnement*; a furious, heedless tenacity which had about it something of the blood-lust of the hunting hound.

# 13.

It was only with the end of his marriage – a brief ordeal which brought experience and self-knowledge at the cost of heartache and large amounts of money – that Peter Marchmont began his serious research into Henri de Saint-Gilles.

Peter had entered the conjugal state mechanically and without question at the age of twenty-four, having presumed it was what everyone did. Standing at the altar with Stephanie, uncomfortable in morning suit and cravat (she had insisted on a church wedding: white tulle, top hats, flowers, bridesmaids, the whole caboodle) he had presumed that the ceremony, as well as removing him from his mother's reach, would spontaneously and as it were magically endow him with the normality he lacked. Stupid boy that he had been. So sure, yet so full of ignorance.

Falling in love with Stephanie had nothing of the heady emotional complexity which he had imagined in his school days to be the common experience of every young man, ugly and overweight or not. Even Mr Bates – Dusty Bates, the old Latin master, with his threadbare gown and bitten fingernails – must once have experienced this ideal passion; if not for Mrs. Bates, then at least for someone else, long ago, before his skin wrinkled and blotched and hair grew in his nostrils. Looking out during Friday afternoon Latin over the quadrangle, where crackling autumn leaves tumbled in the wind, Peter envisaged a love of tortured yet purifying intensity, such as filled the poems they read and parsed.

The reality had been a yoke not of help and comfort, but of inequality and torment. For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? Peter's love for Stephanie had been – he was the first to admit it – little more than a nosing out of a warm body in which to satisfy a momentary instinct and achieve a brief oblivion. What he had thought to be love turned quickly to its opposite; it was his hatred,

slowly simmering as the months went by, which was refined and complex. How many other men felt the same after a few years of marriage, Peter wondered, but refused to acknowledge it?

He had thought her beautiful, once. Her corpulence – the milk-white flesh which she rubbed daily with creams and potions, a backside which wobbled like milky jelly when he slapped it – was, at last, flesh of his flesh; grounding him in the here and now, it gave him cause to believe, if only for a moment in the arms of a woman in a refurbished two-up two-down in Hackney, in his own solidity.

She was, he came to realise, an ugly bitch. In the mornings she transformed her face, applied dark eyeliner and shadow to her eyes, crimson lipstick to her full mouth; thick mascara, heavy blusher over pale cream. It removed all softness from her face so that she took on the appearance of a painted Victorian doll he had once seen in the V & A: monstrous and unappealing, staring out of porcelain rigidity. She teased him about his shyness; made fun of his stutter; a slight impediment, but one which increased under stress.

One night, as he spilled himself inside her, she whispered that she had to have a child, his child. It was only then that he told her he was empty, blank, a dead end. Sickened by the idea of diluting his ancient seed, and knowing that she would use it for her own purposes, to fashion out of it a homunculus after her own heart, he had secretly taken steps to prevent his replication in flesh and blood. She reacted with wailing and screaming, which he noted with little emotion except distaste; listened to her sobbing into her pillow that night and every subsequent night; until, in the end, she divorced him. He made no fuss, gave her a good settlement. They had made some profit on the house, on which he had, to make her happy, lavished more money than he could afford. But he felt only an immense relief, as if he had regained a freedom once lost, and moved back in with his mother.

It was then that Henri de Saint-Gilles came out of the shadows. An alter ego whom he

knew but could not see, voiceless and maligned, Saint-Gilles had lurked at the edge of Peter's consciousness since his mid-teens. In the late sixties, an uncle had paid a farewell visit to Peter and his mother before emigrating to South Africa. Uncle Bernard, older by nearly ten years than his wayward and absent brother, Peter's father, whose whereabouts were unknown and who was never mentioned, bestowed two gifts on the fifteen-year-old Peter: a ferocious groping in the dark of the inner hall, while his mother was sewing upstairs in the drawing room; and a momentary glimpse of his own distant past.

'We're supposed to be descended from French aristocrats – on my mother's side,' said Uncle Bernard to Peter over tea on the last day of his visit. To Peter's delight, Mrs Seymour had made scones with raspberry jam, and a lemon cake, and chocolate truffles which sat large as billiard balls on the white doily. 'A lot of them came to London after the French Revolution, to escape the guillotine. My cousin Jackie started looking into it – dry old stick she was, nothing to keep her occupied in the dark winter nights – got as far back as about 1850. Then I got hooked on it myself, when I was invalided out of the army and had time to spare. There were two families, called Saint-Gilles and Marchemont. With an E. One of the Saint-Gilles branch was executed for spying early in the nineteenth century – got his head chopped off after all. Henry he was called. I don't know anything else about him. The Marchemonts seem to have been a pretty harmless bunch.

'And now you're leaving the old world,' said Peter's mother, acerbically. 'I wonder why.'

'Off to pastures new,' he said. 'Sunshine and black bodies. Voices raised in song.'

Peter watched from the drawing-room window the next day as the slightly ridiculous figure in long shorts and a Pith helmet carried his bags to the waiting taxi. After his departure, Peter's mother tutted and said, 'Invalided out of the army, indeed! Dishonourably discharged, no doubt about it, though it was all hushed up. Scrounged off us for months.' When Peter asked why he had been discharged, she merely replied, 'Never you mind. Dirty ungrateful so-

and-so.’ But Peter was thinking about the French exile. He had, in a flash of recognition, understood that this man was significant to him; that, though outwardly very different, their fates were essentially the same, encapsulated in loneliness, misunderstanding and calumny.

# 14.

‘Shit,’ said Julia. She was sitting on her tiny balcony, staring at the sycamore tree on the other side of the road.

Bad news?’ said Miles, handing her the plate of toast he had made. He sat down, put his arm round her.

‘I’m going to have to find somewhere else to live.’ She handed him the letter she had just opened.

Dear Julia,

I know this may come as a bit of a shock, but I’m moving back to England. I know I said I was going to settle here in Oz, but I've had a couple of upsets. I thought I’d found someone and it turned out he was married. I was bitten on my foot by a spider and kept coming up in blisters for weeks. And it’s so hot. Anyway, I've made plans and I'll be back before the beginning of September – there's some things I want to do while I'm here, and I've very kindly been given the use of a villa till the end of August, with a swimming pool. Then I'm flying to Sydney, and I’ll come home from there. Because the house in Edgbaston’s still let out, I'll need the flat, I'm afraid. That's why I'm writing now, to give you plenty of notice. I don’t really want to live in London but there’s nothing for it till I get myself sorted. Tricia

‘You can always move in with me,’ said Miles, kissing the top of her head; then, seeing the look on her face, he added, ‘If you’ve got nowhere else.’

She leant her head against his shoulder and closed her eyes. The raucous trilling of the telephone cut into her reverie. She let out a long, controlled sigh and Miles answered it.

‘A man called Matteo or something. Sounds French.’

‘Julia, it’s Mathias Fournier. I hope I’m not disturbing you? I’ve got some good news.

I've traced the Saint-Gilles family chateau. The countess says she's got some papers, she's not sure what exactly. She's invited us down. What are you doing the last week in June?'

'Could it be the week after that? The Academy's shut then, for redecoration. I wouldn't have to take leave.'

'Sure, I don't see why not. I'll drive you down from Paris.'

'I can get the train.'

'No, it's fine. Really. It's quite remote. I know the area.'

'Where is it? The chateau.'

'In the Charente. You don't sound very happy. I thought you'd be pleased.'

'I'm fine. It's nothing. I'm sorry; I'm very grateful.'

'I'll ring you back when I've spoken to the countess. Ciao.'

Julia decided to shelve the problem of Aunt Tricia's return till after her visit to France. Following the trail was of the utmost importance; it was too easy to let the mundane business of life get in the way. She said nothing to Miles and he did not ask.

They arrived on Sunday evening, after a five-hour journey. Julia had taken the Eurostar from London that morning. Mathias's car – a black Toyota of some sort – was low on the ground, subtly flamboyant, clichéd. Not that much of a Diogenes, then. Must be on a good salary. Julia exhausted the few questions she had about the chateau within the first hour of the journey, dozed uneasily in the soft leather seat. He seemed content to drive in silence, absorbed in his own thoughts. What did his wife think about his going away with a woman he hardly knew? Not that she had anything to fear. Julia sighed, looked out of the window at orange-roofed houses and tiny farming villages. It was to her work that she was faithful, and nothing would come between her and it.

'Do you ever find,' she said, breaking into his silence, 'that you can't give a project up?'

'No.'

'I sometimes think I could spend the whole of my life on this research. I could do what Richard Turnbull did with his *Treatise* and *Lexicon* – hang on continually for more information, fresh evidence. I'm almost afraid to write my thesis because it will limit what I can find out.'

'But then you'd never do anything else. I'm usually infatuated with a project, at the beginning. By the time I've finished, I'm sick of the sight of it. You have to do the best you can with what you've got at the time, then move on. You can always revisit it later, if new evidence does come to light. Have you been to Angoulême?' he asked, as they passed the turn-off.

'I don't know this part of France at all.'

'If there's time I'll take you. It's beautiful.' He looked at her, his dark eyebrows creasing. 'You haven't told me much about Richard Turnbull.'

'I'm not sure what to tell.' She could have added, 'And I'm not sure what your agenda is,' but thought it would sound unnecessarily rude. She was in the difficult and uncomfortable position of having to trust him to lead her to information she desperately wanted. His readiness to help, his very friendliness, were suspect. Beneath the urbane exterior must lurk an ulterior motive of one form or another. Besides, what sort of lecturer drove a flashy sports car and had time on his hands? John Selby was easier to deal with; he was secretive, hostile and obviously not to be trusted, but their relationship was a symbiotic one in which each paid for what they got and consequently owed the other nothing. Did Mathias intend to poach her research? She was wary of sharing too much with him, for fear it might be engulfed, subsumed into his own.

The Chateau Ruffec was a fifteenth-century manor house twenty kilometres from Poitiers.

Madame la Comtesse, a sprightly octogenarian in blue jeans and a white grandad shirt, spoke no English. She welcomed them on the terrace.

'You must be tired. I'll show you your rooms, then you can rest before dinner. I've put you in the north-east wing; it's cooler there. And please call me Ghislaine; Madame la Comtesse is too formal for a woman of my age.'

Julia opened the shutters of her room and looked down at the terrace and an orchard, its trees in full flower. In a distant field, an old woman dressed in black was gathering mushrooms into a trug, methodically searching, her head bent. Julia's bedroom was furnished with eighteenth-century furniture and, thank God, had its own bathroom. Between it and Mathias's room was a shared sitting-room, with a large table at which Julia sat and worked for the two hours before dinner.

There were two other guests at the meal: Marie-Odette, the countess's daughter – a rotund and neurotic fifty-year-old – and her partner, known only by his surname, Polvier, both teachers in Limoges. Polvier, a man of overwhelming ugliness and shabby clothes, kissed Julia avidly, and she caught the mingled stench of stale Gauloises and cheap wine, felt his fingers curl round hers as she withdrew her hand.

Marie-France, the household's one remaining servant, served radishes with butter, lamb cutlets in a Roquefort sauce with sauteed potatoes, a green salad, cheese and a pear tart. Julia, who ate irregularly and had little interest in food, was surprised at how hungry she was.

'All the food comes from the local farms, said the countess. 'We used to own them all, but we've had to sell them off, bit by bit. Everything except the chateau, and a few fields.'

'Quite right too,' said Polvier. 'Let the farmers own the farms. Makes sense.'

'Boh,' said Ghislaine; 'you and your text-book socialism. We were good landlords.'

'Have you lived here all your life?' asked Mathias.

‘Since I married François in 1946. We had planned to marry in 1940 but then the Germans came. François couldn’t join the army because of a heart tremor. So he joined the Macquis, kept it quiet – they weren’t that fussy. I followed him. We made a pact; we would marry only once the Germans were defeated.’ She chuckled. ‘I nearly got myself killed once, laying mines on the bridge in the village. I bumped into a German patrol. Luckily I was fit in those days, and just ran like crazy before they had time to shoot me.’

‘A lot of the Macquisards were good communists,’ grumbled Polvier, and went outside for a smoke.

The next morning, the countess took them up to a large airy room on the first floor.

‘My late husband’s study,’ she said, unlocking the drawers of an escritoire. ‘There aren’t many documents here; I gave a lot to the university when François died; I’m not even sure I ever read them. I suppose I should have given these too, but I ran out of steam. Most of our books also went to the university; some of them were quite rare – so many books destroyed in the Revolution. This estate was largely unaffected, though. Feel free to look at everything. I’ll leave you; I don’t know how many summer mornings I have left, and this one’s too perfect to be wasted indoors.’

The drawers of the desk contained bundles of letters, neatly tied with blue ribbon. It took over an hour to sort through them, replace them in their envelopes and tie them up again. There was just one small bundle of three letters from the 1790s; the rest were dated between 1882 and 1929. Julia, who had slept badly the night before and was tired after the long day of travelling, felt dislocated in this new place. She would have coped better on her own. All this way for three letters. What could they possibly reveal? She pulled the sleeves of her baggy jumper down over her hands, hugged herself as if she were cold.

‘Hung over?’ asked Mathias, looking up at her. He was running his hands over the

escritoire, peering into the backs of the drawers. 'It was a particularly fine Bordeaux.'

'I only drank one glass,' she said defensively. 'Or perhaps two. What are you doing, anyway? Looking for secret hidey-holes?'

'Well, it was worth a try,' he said, in response to her scornful look. 'It's not unusual in furniture of this period. Why don't you make a start on those letters?'

Half an hour later, sitting at the desk – at which Saint-Gilles himself might have sat – she looked out at the orchard, sun-dappled; saw Ghislaine sitting at a card table under a plum tree, typing on an old typewriter; the irregular clack of the keys punctuated the stillness of the summer morning through the open window. Julia saw herself as it were from outside, head on hand, unruly hair partially subdued, and thought, This is what I do best. Her work was a lens, which focussed and brought together the disparate elements of her being, but it was also a prism, splitting her into constituent parts, which fanned out like the rainbow; where to, she did not yet know.

She caught Mathias's eye.

'Do you only relax when you're working?' he asked.

'Or drinking.' Then, seriously, 'Yes. Miles says I'm obsessed but it's bigger than that.' Then, without explanation, she rushed out of the room and down to the orchard.

'Ghislaine, forgive me for disturbing you, but you said just now that the estate wasn't affected by the Revolution?'

'Yes?'

'It wasn't confiscated, then?'

'No, no; it's a small estate – by comparison – and a long way from Paris. Most likely they kept their heads down, let it all blow over.'

When she returned, Mathias had taken her place at the desk.

'What did you make of this letter?' he said.

‘This estate wasn’t confiscated in the Revolution. So that’s another lie that Saint-Gilles told at his trial. I don’t know about the letter; I wasn’t sure what to make of it.’ She took it from him and read it again, leaning against the desk:

8th June

My darling – My brother is here and forbids me any further contact with you. I pass each day in the forlorn hope that I will see you again. When we quarrelled, I thought you would soon forgive me, and everything would be as it had been. But the day I watched you ride away was the last – of our love, of my life. Anger took hold of me and my cruel words cannot now be unsaid. I have only the secret child within me which is of you. If he survives I would name him after you, but I know Henri will forbid it.

I fear for Henri, fear what he has become. He thinks I know nothing of his involvement in things he should have left alone. He was once a kind and honest man. He felt keenly the injustices and inequalities of this country, pestered our father to do more for the peasants, wanted him to provide education and a doctor – for the peasants! – as if they were no different from ourselves. Indeed he said, that had they been born into our circumstances, they would act and behave as we do. Father's reply was that if they were to take our place, then we should have to take theirs; for there must always be rich and poor – and how would Henri like that? But Henri was undeterred; and when news came of that awful day, he rushed, overjoyed, to Paris. Alas, he became then ruthless, self-absorbed, as if he had a secret which he needed to conceal. I wish he could have known you. You, perhaps, could have softened him.

9th June

When Henri returned, I thought he would have have pity for my plight. He had been in Paris so long, nearly two years. I could not hold in what I had to tell him – ran down the stairs to the hall – as he strode through the door – I could not stop my tears, –

I thought never to have seen him thus – incensed, white – fists clenched – I will have

vengeance upon him, he shouted, I swear it.

He has nonetheless been good to me; he will see that I am well taken care of, will provide for the child. But he frightens me. He is driven by something I cannot comprehend.

16th June

I am to be sent away, this day, to Henri's house on the Ile d'Oléron. There I may bring forth my child in obscurity; this child who is now my life, my only reminder of him.

Henri tries each day to force me to reveal his identity, but I will not. Even if he is returned to his own country, Henri would be capable of seeking him out. He would stop at nothing.

All around me is black, hopeless. I have never lived anywhere but this chateau which is my home. Shall I ever return?

Dated this twentieth day of June in the year 1800.

R. de Saint-Gilles.

'It raises more questions than it answers,' Julia said, handing the letter back. 'Is it relevant? Who wrote it? More importantly, to whom? Was it sent here or written here? It's interesting as a text; it starts as a letter, ends as a third-person account; the lover has receded from 'you' to 'he'; rather sad, I suppose. I'd say at a guess the writer – this R. de Saint-Gilles, whoever she was – lived here and never managed to post her letter. The brother could possibly be my Henri de Saint-Gilles?'

'*Your* Henri de Saint-Gilles,' he said with a raised eyebrow, 'he was indeed. Born in 1769, executed in England, as you have told me, in 1813. His sister, Rosine de Saint-Gilles, was one of only two of his siblings to survive childhood. Six died in infancy. Rosine was born in 1779, died in 1808. The child survived her. She had an older sister called Sophie.'

'You're making all this up?'

'No.' He grinned. 'There's a large family tree. At the front of a missal which I found in

one of the desk drawers. Take a look.'

'OK,' she said, lifting her head from the untidy diagram and rubbing her eyes; 'Saint-Gilles's sister had an illegitimate baby in … 1800 or 1801. He was furious about it. She refused to name her lover – who wasn't French. Henri had got mixed up in something she didn't like. Where does that leave us? What do the other two letters say?'

'One is her deathbed letter – that's how we can be sure the other is written by Rosine. She signs this one with her full name – look – and the handwriting is the same. She says she forgives her sister for the wrong she has done her, begs her to take good care of the child – named Raoul – and asks for God's forgiveness. A few bequests. The other is a poem – not one I recognise – in the same handwriting.'

Julia glanced at the poem. 'Perhaps she wrote it herself. It's a banal enough little verse …'

'… of love which ends only with death. A skilfully-executed cipher underneath.' Drawn in ink were two letter Rs, one the mirror image of the other, the two tails intricately entwined. 'Rosine and her lover, perhaps? Or her son?'

'Or just a reflection of herself?' suggested Julia.

After lunch, while Ghislaine was taking her siesta and Mathias was seeing a friend at the university of Poitiers, Julia walked in the shade of the orchard. She found a low wicker chair which she placed under an apple tree near the pink brick wall, rested her feet on a stone bench and read over her notes:

> Richard Turnbull seems to have embraced duality as a way of life. In a society polarised by strong opinions for and against war and revolution, he had a foot in both camps. A Jacobin and an atheist (though to what extent these were significant factors in his life, as opposed to bluster and posturing, is perhaps open to debate), he frequented more than one revolutionary society in

the provincial towns he visited. Yet, on moving to London, he found employment with a public servant, rubbed shoulders with the Church-and-King set, and was subsequently recruited by the government as a spycatcher. The burning question is: was he a double agent?

'Hey, Julia, wake up. Good news.' She felt a gentle tap on her shoulder.

'I've not been asleep all this time?' She closed her notebook.

'I've arranged for us to go and see the Saint-Gilles archives tomorrow. We've got four days max. Hélène says she'll bend the rules, because I'm an old friend; but her manager is back on Monday. She says she'll have to lock us in – because we've not got proper letters of recommendation. You don't have a problem with that, do you?'

Julia shook her head. 'I'd live in a dungeon if it meant I could get closer to the truth.'

He sprawled on the bench, his back against the tree.

'I'm not sure what I'm looking for here. What else can you tell me?'

She was silent for a while. 'I thought Turnbull was just an obscure wandering scholar – idiosyncratic, unorthodox, a freethinker, all the things I admire. He made himself up as he went along, was constantly crossing boundaries, wasn't afraid of ambiguity.' She looked up and saw he was stifling a yawn. 'Am I boring you?'

'Not at all. I beg your pardon. I don't always sleep at night.'

'Anyway, I then find out he's somehow mixed up in spying and I'm confused. A lot of Richard's identity seems to ride on this affair with Saint-Gilles – but it's come out of the blue for me. I have a contact – one of the few people who knows anything about Richard Turnbull – who is convinced that it was Richard who was the spy, and that he framed Saint-Gilles.'

'On what evidence?'

'Hasn't produced any. That's fishy to start with, but I'm keeping an open mind. That period of Turnbull's life isn't well documented. What I do know is that Richard was taken on by the government to flush out a spy who was sending secrets to the French. History names

Saint-Gilles as that spy.'

'Which hypothesis do you favour?'

'Richard could easily have been recruited by the French. He spoke the language fluently, sympathised with the Revolution. And it wouldn't have been difficult to frame Saint-Gilles. Popular opinion would have been against him from the start – a foreigner, an enemy. The jury were just ordinary men. But, given the lack of evidence, I don't see much point muddying the waters with conspiracy theories. Lots of people supported the Revolution, especially in its early days; that doesn't mean they were spies. And there's something else … I'm not sure about this man, this contact. I can't put my finger on it, but there's something about him I just don't trust.'

'So you do believe in intuition after all.'

She laughed. She had an urge to tell Mathias about Richard Turnbull's commonplace book. She ignored it. He would not understand.

'Do you read Greek?' she asked.

'Ancient Greek?'

'Yes.

'No. Why?'

'I've got some material that Richard Turnbull wrote in Greek. I need a translator.'

He stretched out on the bench, closed his eyes. A few minutes later, he said, 'Of course, we may never find the answers; the facts quite simply might not have survived.'

'I'll cross that bridge when I come to it.'

# 15.

While Julia was talking in the orchard with Mathias, Miles was sitting in the Blue Teapot with a ham and mozzarella panini and a bottle of mineral water, next to a plaque detailing the arrest and execution of a French émigré in 1812.

He had followed Julia to her latest evening meeting, four months ago, convinced that she was up to something behind his back. Nineteenth-century research just couldn't be that compelling. He half – but only half – suspected another man; it was not her style to go behind his back. If there was someone else, she would say so. Fiercely independent, in total control of her life, she sometimes seemed to enjoy shocking him. Though she shared her body with him, the rest of her might as well be encased in armour. What she couldn't see was that she herself was controlled by this thing which left little room for him. It wasn't good for her.

He had tailed her uneasily that February evening, keeping well back and mingling with the crowds to make sure she did not see him. It was a dry evening; he followed her east along New Cross Road. She was a fast walker. Mechanically, Miles took a piece of paper held out to him by a Bible-basher, crunched it in his pocket without reading it. Julia seemed to be heading for Greenwich. She'd better not walk back; too dangerous by far for a woman on her own.

He saw her disappear through the doors of the Spanish Galleon. When he entered the pub, she was sitting at a small table by the window, opposite a flabby fifty-year-old. She had her back to him. Miles bought a pint of bitter and found a table well away, in a corner, where he could keep an eye on them. The pub was full and very noisy; with any luck he would remain undetected. He was taking a big chance. The consequences of being discovered did not bear thinking about; she would never forgive him for interfering in her private life.

They had one drink each: Julia an orange juice, the flab a pint of lager. They exchanged

large-format envelopes. So, thought Miles with some relief, it wasn't an affair, then. Julia did not stay long. Thank God; she hadn't seen him. Following the fat man would be a piece of cake.

For a moment, as he watched her walk through the door, her long grey coat open to the wind, Miles was tempted to run after her and take her in his arms, breathe in the soft, fresh smell of her hair. But how can you tell a woman who says that love is an obsolete cliché, a sentimental shorthand for a complex raft of psychological and evolutionary instincts, that you love her?

Walking past the Blue Teapot ten minutes after the fat man had let himself in, Miles stopped to note the name above the door: Peter John Marchmont, licensed to sell intoxicating liquors to be consumed with food. The next day he ran a PNC check on Marchmont. The man was clean.

He had said nothing of this to Julia. During the intervening months he had seen her became more preoccupied, more wrapped up in this thing which excluded him. She would go anywhere, do anything, for Richard Turnbull. There was the trip to the Roaches, then the French man on the phone, which she had not explained; and Miles's suspicions had resurfaced. Two days after Julia left for whatever chateau she was visiting in France – no wonder she never had any money – Miles returned to the Blue Teapot as a customer.

It was a grade two listed building. Small inside, just six tables of varying sizes arranged round the L-shaped counter. The dark of the wood-panelled walls was relieved by the pine tables and gleaming stainless steel cutlery. The food was poncey and over-priced, but it was good to eat, and the place had a lively atmosphere. No children. Marchmont, dressed in black trousers and a crisp white shirt under a black apron, served Miles with a quiet flourish, laying the plates and cutlery meticulously on the table. The first two fingers of his right hand were stained with something dark, black or blue, which he had attempted to scrub off. He

was affable and polite, in the superficial way that publicans and restaurateurs usually are.

‘You been here long?’ asked Miles as he paid at the counter.

‘A few years. I used to live in Primrose Hill. Bought this place when my mother died. Did you enjoy your food?’

‘It was very good. I’ll come again.’ Miles pocketed his change and left.

19,783 words

# Author's Note

All the characters in this work are fictitious except for the following, who are mentioned in the letters of Richard Turnbull: Thomas Young gave the second of his Royal Society lectures on optics in November 1803. Rudolph Ackermann was a publisher and bookseller who owned a shop in the Strand (see *The Microcosm of London*, below). Coleridge was in London from late 1810, seeking help for his opium addiction, and Leigh Hunt was imprisoned for two years from February 1813 for a libel in the *Examiner* against the Prince Regent.

The following sources provided general background information:

Doyle, William, *The French Revolution; A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)

Harvie, Christopher and Matthew, H. C. G., *Nineteenth-Century Britain; A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

Byatt, A. S., *Unruly Times; Wordsworth and Coleridge in their Time* (London: Vintage, 1997)

The *Dictionary of National Biography* was helpful for its short articles on contemporary figures:
*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) [www.oxforddnb.com.voyager.chester.ac.uk]

Some of the most fruitful and interesting sources were those written in the early nineteenth century. Chief amongst these were Coleridge's letters, which give a detailed and fascinating insight into his life and times:

Griggs, Earl Leslie (ed.), *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956)

Also interesting and useful were the following:

Dart, Gregory (ed.), *William Hazlitt: Metropolitan Writings* (Manchester: Fyfield Books, Carcanet Press, 2005)

Southey, Robert, *Letters from England* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1984)

Breen, Jennifer (ed.), *Women Romantics 1785-1832: Writing in Prose* (London: Everyman Paperbacks, J M Dent, 1996)

Wu, Duncan, (ed.), *Romanticism* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1998)

Historical sources are inspirational as well as informative. Particularly so were:

The *Almanach impérial* for 1808. Through its long lists and its details of civil and military structures can be glimpsed a picture of Napoleonic France.
*Almanach Impérial, An Bissextil M. DCCC. VIII,* (Paris: Testu, 1808).

The *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org) were useful in providing details of contemporary trials. Of especial interest was the trial of Francis Henry de la Motte for high treason (spying) in July 1781 (ref: t17810711-1).

A facsimile map of London in 1813 (London and its Environs 1813: Reproduction map from an engraving by Henry Cooper, originally published by Sherwood, Neely and Jones) bought from www.parishregister.com.

A selection from *The Microcosm of London*, by Rowlandson and Pugin, originally published in the early nineteenth century by Rudolph Ackermann; this contains sixteen pictures reproduced from the original *Microcosm*:
Summerson, John (ed.), *The Microcosm of London* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1943)

Information on the making of quill pens was obtained from the following websites:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A993369
http://www.regia.org/quill2.htm

The quotation on page 50 is from the King James Bible, 2 Corinthians, 6:14.